UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

DEAF THEATRE IN CANADA:
SIGNPOSTS TO AN OTHER LAND

BY

RACHEL E. TRACIE ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS.

DEPARTMENT OF DRAMA

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled DEAF THEATRE IN CANADA: SIGNPOSTS TO AN OTHER LAND submitted by RACHEL E. TRACIE in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the development and the subsequent failure of a national deaf theatre company in Canada. As the most significant attempt at a national deaf theatre company in Canada, the Canadian Theatre of the Deaf (CTD) is explored through various contexts: deaf language and culture, which play a vital role in the development of any deaf theatre company, especially one which seeks to establish itself as a national theatre of the deaf; the styles of deaf theatre, so that a criteria may be set up against which to compare the style of the Canadian Theatre of the Deaf; and comparison with the National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD) in the United States, on which the CTD was modeled.

This thesis seeks to discover why, based primarily upon the experience of the Canadian Theatre of the Deaf, attempts at deaf theatre in Canada have been unsuccessful. This thesis identifies a number of factors, all of which are interdependent, which are needed before a successful deaf theatre in Canada could be established.

The information in this thesis was gleaned from archival information at the Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf, from studies done on deaf theatre in the United States, and from interviews with three individuals involved with the development of deaf theatre in Canada: Angela Petrone Stratiy, Gordon Hoeppner, and Linda Rubin.

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Introduction

There's no Canadian Theatre of the Deaf right now, no money, no funding. (Petrone Stratiy)

There's not enough deaf professionals in this, so it seems to be very short lived. (Petrone Stratiy)

There is no network of communication. There is a deaf community of course, but there just doesn't seem to be an attachment with the deaf community and the theatre community. (Hoeppner)

In these 1997 comments, Angela Petrone Stratiy and Gordon Hoeppner, two deaf Canadians who have been involved with the development of deaf theatre in Canada, paint a dark picture for the future of deaf theatre in Canada. Over the years, they have been two people among many who have believed that deaf theatre indeed is a possibility for Canada. Companies such as Theatre Visuel des Sourds in Quebec, A Show of Hands in Ontario, The Canadian Deaf Theatre in British Columbia, Fingers Happy Productions in Ontario, The Deaf-Gypsy Mime Company in Nova Scotia, and The Canadian Theatre of the Deaf in Vancouver have all made attempts to establish themselves as deaf theatres in Canada. All have failed. While the lack of networking with and interest from the deaf community may well have contributed to the failure of these companies, there are more specific reasons as to why deaf theatre in Canada has failed. These reasons can best be explored through examining as a model the Canadian Theatre of the Deaf (CTD), a company established by the Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf (CCSD) in 1976. I intend to explore the development of the CTD, and identify specific reasons for the failure of that company. I will then extrapolate from these reasons to establish why deaf theatre in Canada as a whole has not succeeded as a national project.

The Canadian Theatre of the Deaf was formed in response to the commercial and critical success of the National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD) in the United States which was established in 1968. At that time, the NTD was forging new ground in a style of theatre which combined elements of sign language, speech, movement and mime to create a unique theatre experience. There have been numerous studies done on the National Theatre of the Deaf in the United States, as well as on various deaf theatre companies around the world. There have been books discussing the nature and style of deaf theatre, theses documenting specific deaf theatre productions, comparative works on deaf theatre in the United States and Russia, books on translating English plays into American Sign Language, and studies on the nature of the deaf cultural experience. However, almost nothing has been written on Canada's deaf theatres. Largely unsuccessful, they have appeared, then disappeared without a trace. Although small and somewhat modest in comparison with the theatre companies in other countries, the deaf theatre companies in Canada represent the desire of deaf Canadians to grab hold of their cultural heritage through the arts, and express their need to bring greater awareness to their language and experience. This important element of deaf history in Canada is largely overlooked, even in studies on deaf culture in Canada.

In this thesis, I will attempt to study deaf theatre in Canada in order to make conclusions as to why it has been unsuccessful. Such a study is fraught with frustration due to the fact that there are few functioning deaf theatres in Canada at present, and what has happened in the past has not been adequately documented. There does exist, however, archival material from the Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf which outlines the development of Canada's first national theatre of the deaf. This thesis

represents the archival material gathered from the Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf, interviews with three individuals involved in the development of deaf theatre in Canada, and material gleaned from studies done on deaf theatre in the United States.

In order to get a comprehensive look at deaf theatre in Canada, and specifically the Canadian Theatre of the Deaf, it is essential to provide contexts within which the study can be approached. In Chapter One, I will provide the context of deaf language and culture, which play a vital role in the development of any deaf theatre company. A theatre that seeks to reach a deaf audience or use deaf actors must be informed by the language and culture of the deaf community. In Chapter Two, I will establish the context of the criteria by which deaf theatre may be evaluated and defined. These criteria will then inform my analysis of the National Theatre of the Deaf in the United States in Chapter Three, and of the Canadian Theatre of the Deaf in Canada in Chapter Four.

Chapter One - Deaf Language & Culture

Because the considerable influence which language and culture play in the process of theatre cannot be underestimated, it is vital that deaf theatre be studied within its integral context, general though it may be, of the language and culture of the deaf community in North America. Deaf theatre deals with a language which few Canadians know, and illuminates a culture which is hidden to many. Attempts at deaf theatre in Canada have failed largely due to the fact that the language and culture of the surrounding deaf community were largely overlooked or taken for granted by the theatre companies. This chapter will provide a framework for further critical analysis into how language and culture are essential factors that must be considered when attempting to develop a successful deaf theatre company.

Deaf Theatre combines elements of American Sign Language (ASL) with mime, dance and voice to create a distinct performance style which focuses on visual language. Traditionally, the focus of theatre and dramatic literature has been on the spoken and written word. Playwrights play with language, illuminate culture, and engage in story. Playwrights such as Harold Pinter, Samuel Beckett, and William Shakespeare create plays which stretch and manipulate conventional language to create a more dramatic and meaningful experience. Deaf Theatre originates a style of performance which manipulates both spoken *and* visual elements to create a synthesis of vocal and physical stimuli. While many audiences, hearing and deaf, have watched deaf theatre performance, many are unaware that the visual aspect of the performance is not simply exaggerated gesture, but is based in language.

American Sign Language is the primary language of the deaf community in North America, and is the primary means of identification among its members. While the audience of a deaf theatre production may not be hindered in their enjoyment of a deaf theatre performance by not understanding its roots in language, it is significant that by not understanding or being made aware of this, they are perpetuating a mistaken belief about ASL, namely that it is not language but gesture.

History

Sign Languages have been used in deaf communities and families for centuries. American Sign Language, as a designated language, has its roots in the mid-eighteenth century with the establishment of the first school for deaf children in France. One of the instructors, Charles Michel, Abbe de l'Epee became interested in the sign language used by two deaf sisters and began to learn their unique communication. In 1760, he opened his own school for the deaf. While most of the students at the school used this sign language, l'Epee added to it French grammar, thus teaching in a form called "methodical signs" which simply imposed the French language onto the already grammatically-based French Sign Language (LSF). This is the same concept as many signed systems used in deaf education today. Systems, such as SEE sign and Exact Signed English, use many of the signs of ASL but put them into English word order and add certain English grammatical features such as articles, which do not exist in ASL. Laurent Clerc, a contemporary of Abbe Roch Ambroise Sicard, who was also a French teacher at the deaf school, and Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, an American who visited the school in 1816 to learn about its methods,

brought their knowledge of LSF back to America, and established the first deaf school in Hartford, Connecticut in 1817.

Deaf schools began to show up in North America and by 1867, the recognition of ASL and LSF as languages suitable for teaching had become a major achievement for the deaf community. The community was validated by this achievement and they were able to take their language out of private use into public and educational settings. After the establishment of Gallaudet's school in the United States in 1817 "other states soon began to seriously embrace the educational movement for deaf children and opened their own state schools" (Carbin 16). Canada also established residential schools and by 1899 "had seven . . . one each in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Ontario, and Manitoba, and three in Quebec" (Carbin 16). However, despite the rise of deaf schools which used some sort of signed system, by 1867 things had changed drastically. All over the world, the predominant idea of the sanctity of speech was taking hold.

Just as an awareness of deaf culture and language had begun to develop in schools for the deaf, a major step backwards occurred in the mid-nineteenth century as the arguments for the divinity of speech directly affected schooling of deaf children. A new method called "oralism" was introduced into deaf school systems around the world. Oralism was a method by which speech and lipreading were taught to deaf students and American Sign Language was not allowed. Samuel Heineke, a German educator of the deaf had been practicing oralism since 1778. In France, supporters of the oral method "convinced the French government that sign language lacked grammar and that its use prevented deaf people from understanding French,'" and the French government substituted oral French for LSF in all government-funded schools (Carbin 10). In the

United States, schools which used oral methods began to appear as early as 1870. Although oralism had already been introduced in Europe and the United States, official sanction was not given to its practice in educational settings until 1880 in Milan, at the First World Congress to Improve the Welfare of the Deaf and the Blind. The Congress was a gathering of 256 educators of the deaf, but only two of the delegates were actually deaf. The Congress decided that oralism was the only way to "restore deaf people to society" (Lane 113), therefore it should be the only method of instruction.

The effects of oralism spread quickly and were felt world wide. "In America, there were 26 institutions for the education of deaf children in 1867, and ASL was the language of instruction in all; by 1907, there were 139 schools for deaf children, and ASL was allowed in none" (Lane 111-113). The impact of this shift in approach radically affected the deaf community: "the meeting at Milan was the single most critical event in driving the languages of deaf communities beneath the surface" (Lane 113). Much that had been gained in the preceding years was lost, and it was many years before ASL was allowed back in schools. Even today a combined approach to education is used. Articulation classes are combined with classes in ASL and English.

Linguistic research into the signed systems of the deaf did not begin until the 1950s with the studies of William C. Stokoe. Stokoe was the first to recognize that there was a system behind the signs, that they were not simply exact representations of English words. However, his research was not fully acknowledged until the 1970s, when other linguists also began to become interested in the development of signed systems. By 1980s, the study of Sign Language had become commonplace, and many linguists

were involved in its study. Stokoe's research became foundational to the many journal articles and books that were being written on the unique grammatical structure of this language. Researchers tended to focus on the patterns, rules and grammar of ASL, while ignoring the community from which it came. In a personal historical perspective on Sign Language research, Dr. Stokoe urged the other researchers:

> Language research must look not just at what it is in people's brains that makes language possible but also at what people say to each other and what they believe and expect, what they think about the world and themselves (Stokoe 7).

His address emphasized the fundamental interconnectedness of American Sign Language and culture. He indicated the importance that "what people fight for is their right to have their culture and their language respected, not the details of that language in the abstract" (Stokoe 7).

The acceptance of American Sign Language has involved a major struggle for the deaf community of North America. The struggle is exacerbated because of various mistaken beliefs in the general population about the language. In his book, Recent Perspectives on American Sign Language, Harry Markowicz presents six common mistaken beliefs about ASL, which will serve here as a context for further analysis into the role of American Sign Language in deaf theatre.

Mistaken Belief #1: Sign Language is Universal

It is a common mistaken belief that sign language is a single universal language which is easy to learn and is understood by deaf people in all countries of the world. In fact, each country has its own sign language, which is rooted in the surrounding cultural landscape, and which

is not easily adaptable from country to country. Even within North America, there are variations in the language:

> In Quebec, for example, Deaf French Canadians use a different sign language, Langue des Signes Quebecois. Nova Scotia has a community of deaf people whose sign language is related to British Sign Language but not to ASL. In fact, in nearly every nation in the world there are several distinct groups of Deaf people, their differences marked by political, historical, or geographical separation (Padden and Humphries 3).

This mistaken belief is often perpetuated by the assumption that because deaf people are skilled in manual communication, they will communicate more easily with those in other countries then would hearing people. In fact, this is not necessarily true, because each country's sign language has its own specific grammatic structure and level of physicalization. For example, Russian sign language, in comparison with American Sign Language, may be viewed as more stilted and unexpressive. A deaf Russian may have as much difficulty communicating with a deaf North American as a hearing Russian and a hearing North American. However, although the language is different from country to country, the cultural aspects of deaf communities around the world are more similar to each other than the cultural aspects among the hearing and deaf communities of the same country. Despite differences in politics, history, and geography, there is a certain identification between deaf communities in other countries because of the experience of deafness and the use of a language which is totally visual, having no written form. As well, sign language in most countries was at one time or another deemed crude, and unworthy of use in schools and in public. Similar experience, and identification with values such as the sanctity of language, bridge many gaps among deaf

communities in different countries even though the language is not the same.

Mistaken Belief #2: Reality Must be Word Based

This mistaken belief is especially prevalent in deaf theatre, where those unfamiliar with ASL may assume that the visual movement they are seeing is meant to be merely symbolic or representational of an English word equivalent. In fact, ASL is not an exact replication of English. Certain signed systems such as Signed English and SEE sign, which are often used in educational settings to teach students to read, simply put a sign to each English word in the syntax of English. These systems are not the same as American Sign Language, which has its own grammar and syntax. ASL is made up of signs, just as English is made up of words, but the way in which the signs are formed and grouped has no basis in English grammar. This mistaken belief also assumes that because there is no written form of ASL, it cannot be considered a valid language. The closest approximation of a written form of ASL uses English words as a gloss to approximate a written form of the language. The glosses use English words but put them into ASL word order and syntax. Glosses cannot, however, capture all of the grammar of ASL because of its visual foundation. For example, in the play *Children of a Lesser God*, the first line Sarah signs is written in an English gloss and then is translated into English: "Me have nothing. Me deafy. Speech inept. Intelligence - tiny blockhead. English - blow away. Left one you. Depend - no. Think myself enough. Join, unjoined". In English, the same phrase reads: "I have nothing; no hearing, no speech, no intelligence, no language. I have only you. I don't need you. I have me alone. Join, unjoined". While the

English gloss gives the order of the signs, it does not capture the movement or the facial markers which would accompany the signs. While a wholly visual language may be difficult to grasp as being valid, American Sign Language is an intricate language based on signs which convey more than merely the spoken or written word.

Mistaken Belief #3: Signs are Glorified Gestures

The third mistaken belief is that signs are merely glorified gestures. In fact, signs are an integral part of American Sign Language. While gesture is used in sign language, it has a very different purpose than gesture used as a complement to speech. Gesture is used in spoken communication to emphasize, illuminate, or directly substitute for spoken language. For example, nodding instead of saying "yes", or shaking your head instead of saying "no", are merely gestures. However, for the deaf, what we may see as gestures are actually governed by a set of grammatical rules which if ignored will result in misunderstanding. ASL consists of signs, and each sign has four parameters: "handshape, location, hand orientation and movement" (Bangs 15). Any change in one of these elements alters the meaning of the sign. For example, if the "five" hand is put to the chin, palm left, the sign is "mother", but if you were to change the handshape to an "a" handshape (a fist with the thumb resting on top of the index finger), palm left, the sign would be "secret". The same thing happens when you change the location of a sign. If you took the handshape for "secret" but moved it, and with your palm facing yourself, tapped it against your chest a couple of times, the sign would be "heartbeat". Movement also changes the sign. For example, the sign for "truth" is formed by touching the tip of the right index finger to the mouth, palm

facing left and then moving it slightly up and forward. If you simply move the right index finger to brush across your lips from side to side, the sign becomes "false". Thus the movement changes the sign. Thus, each parameter must be in place for the sign to be complete. At first glance, a signed conversation might seem to be simply a compilation of gesture and mime, but on closer examination, ASL is revealed as a complex combination of individual signs which follow ASL's own grammar and rules.

The rules of ASL structure can be likened to the restriction of certain vowel and consonant combinations in spoken English. In ASL, the restrictions have to do with placement, movement and handshape. In ASL, "if both hands are moving in a sign, then the handshapes, locations, and movements of the two hands must be the same" (Lane 14). For example, the sign for "wonderful" consists of both flat open hands, palms facing out to be pushed out above the shoulder and then below. Signs that use both hands but in different handshapes follow another rule. If the signs have different handshapes then one must be stationary (Lane 14). For example, the sign for "dance" consists of the "k" hand, palm down, sweeping across the flat hand palm up. Two different handshapes, but the flat hand remains stationary while the "k" hand moves. A superficial assessment of a signed conversation may indicate a language of gesture, but on closer examination, it is much more than an arbitrary compilation of gestures. American Sign Language is a complex language with its own grammar and syntax.

Mistaken Belief #4: ASL is comprised only of Iconic Elements

The fourth mistaken belief is that American Sign Language is comprised only of iconic elements, that is, that each sign is simply a

representation of the English word or thing to which it refers. This belief, too, may be encouraged by deaf theatre performance simply because in many deaf theatre performances, language is taken out of the realm of everyday conversational sign language and moved into a more symbolic or iconic representational form. In fact, this symbolic representation is not true of American Sign Language in its everyday use. ASL is a visual language which depends on iconic relation, in that "elements of the form of a sign are related to visual aspects of what is denoted [but this] does not in any way determine the actual details of the form" (Klima 21). ASL is composed of both arbitrary and iconic elements. Many of the iconic elements of the language have changed over the years to become virtually unrecognizable in relation to their original referent. For example, this is evident in the sign for HOME, which moves the "and" hand fingertips from touching the cheek near the mouth to touching the cheek near the eye. Historically, this sign was a combination of the signs for EAT and SLEEP.

> Over time, the form of the two signs changed until the current merged sign is no longer a compound: the same handshape prevailed throughout the sign; the contact points moved closer together so that instead of one contact on the mouth and one on the cheek there are now two separate contacts on the cheek alone. A consequence of these changes is a complete loss of the iconicity of the original two signs (Klima 29-30).

While the iconic aspects of ASL may be obscured over time or even suppressed in everyday conversation, the iconicity still remains and may be explored mimetically for the purposes of drama, poetry and storytelling. One of the most interesting aspects of deaf theatre is its use of iconicity to expand the meaning of a sign so that it may be more easily understood.

Mistaken Belief #5: Sign Language can only express Concrete Ideas

The fifth mistaken belief is that sign language can only express concrete ideas. In fact, ASL has a large vocabulary and expresses abstract ideas in much the same way as do spoken words. In ASL, nouns and verbs such as "car" and "drive" are formed in the same way, but have different movements. As in English, context is an important element of understanding. For example, in English, the word "plain" can mean "clear," as in "It is plain to see that you are upset," or "unadorned," as in "her wedding dress was rather plain," or even a topographical feature, as in "the Serengeti plain". In these instances, the context provides clues to the meaning of the word. Deaf theatre can take signs out of the flow of everyday conversation and expand them into abstraction, thus clarifying and manipulating the signs to illuminate their meaning. For example, signs with similar handshapes are used in deaf theatre to create a visual poetry complete, with rhythm and consistency of movement. Ideas that are concrete become more malleable and theatrical.

Mistaken Belief #6: Sign Language has no Grammar of its own

Probably the most common mistaken belief is that sign language is simply a visual form of English, and follows the same grammatical rules, using the same written form. In fact, ASL grammar is totally separate from English grammar and does not follow the same rules. It is an interesting experience to watch someone speaking English while they are signing, using a simultaneous translation from one language to the other. This of course would be impossible with any other spoken language, but

much of the confusion surrounding ASL is from the fact that it is totally visual and has no written form. It is difficult to categorize, especially since ASL does use the English alphabet to fingerspell names, places and various words. However, the pattern of English "follows a linear one-word-after-the-other method of transmission, while the spatial characteristics of ASL allows for both sequential and simultaneous transmission of individual signs" (Bangs 6). This is partly due to the fact that many signs contain within them several English words. For example, the signs for "give", "receive", "help" and "ask" can include within them direction. The sentence "Will you help me?" in English is four words, but in ASL is only one sign. The sign for "help" is the right "a" hand (fist with thumb resting on side), palm left, resting on the left open hand palm up. By moving the sign for "help" from the receiver to the signer while tilting the head forward and raising the eyebrows, the sign becomes the question "Will you help me?"

The raised eyebrows of the signer are an integral part of ASL, as are a number of other non-manual markers which signify questions, locations and commands. Non-manual markers are made with the face and movements of the head. It is important to note that:

> the nonmanual activity which occurs in ASL discourse is not simply a function of individual expressiveness on the signer's part; nor is it characteristic of any manual language a signer might use. . . rather, it evidently performs functions specific to ASL (Liddell 13).

For example, when asking a yes/no question, the eyebrows are raised and the head tilted forward, whereas when asking other questions, the head is still tilted forward, but the eyebrows are furrowed and the mouth is

pursed. These are fundamental aspects of the grammar of ASL and without them the language is incomplete (Markowitz 1-6).

These mistaken beliefs are the reasons for much of the struggle of the deaf community to have ASL recognized as a valid language, not just for public use, but especially as a method of instruction in schools. It was not until 1985 that UNESCO recognized ASL as valid for instruction, and their "report on deaf education stated as a principle that 'We must recognize the legitimacy of the sign language as a linguistic system and it should be accorded the same status as other languages'" (Lane 46). The struggle to put ASL into the schools is an integral part of establishing cultural activities for the deaf, such as theatre. The struggle even continues within deaf theatre productions. There is often controversy surrounding how understandable a production is, based on the use of sign language as a tool for communication or a tool for artistic expression.

The Deaf Community

While it may seem natural to assume that, based on their physical deafness alone, deaf people are a part of the deaf community, such assumptions ignore the importance of the shared beliefs and values which are the characteristics of a culturally distinct community. In fact, the North American deaf community is comprised of deaf people who share common experiences, beliefs, values, and language. Although someone's physical deafness would ensure a few shared experiences with members of the deaf community, that does not mean that he or she is willing to align him or herself with that community, or with the values and principles of deaf culture. To assume that a given deaf person is automatically part of

the deaf culture, and naturally adheres to the values and practices of the deaf community, is problematic because

> . . . although somewhere between 11 and 30 per cent of deaf schoolchildren inherit their deafness, fewer than 10 per cent are born to parents who are also deaf. Consequently, in contrast to the situation in most cultures, the great majority of individuals within the community of deaf people do not join at birth (Padden and Humphries 5).

Some deaf people make an active choice to belong to the distinct and rich fabric of the deaf community, while others choose to associate themselves more closely with the hearing community. Some deaf people who grow up as part of the hearing community are not even aware that there is a deaf community.

All of these issues must be taken into consideration when forming a deaf theatre company. Because there are many deaf people in North America, to whom should the theatre appeal? Can it be accessible to both the deaf community, and to those who are deaf but do not align themselves with the deaf community? To explore these questions, it is necessary to extend our framework to include deaf culture.

There are many factors which determine one's choice to become a part of the deaf community and to be actively involved in deaf culture. It is not simply being deaf or even using American Sign Language that constitutes acknowledgement of one's membership in the deaf community. In her M.A. thesis titled "Deaf Theatre Performance: An Aristotelean Approach", Rusalyn Andrews outlines four factors which affect one's choice to belong to the deaf community. Her examples are succinct and illustrate four general tenets of deaf culture. Her factors include:

1) Personal philosophies toward awareness of deafness. . . and matters relating to personal pride,
2) Choice of ASL as primary language,
3) Acceptance of a group identity, and
4) Adherence to cultural norms, values and goals (Andrews 20).

Personal Philosophies Toward Awareness of Deafness and Matters Relating to Personal Pride

Two of the main factors determining a deaf person's personal philosophy toward deafness are degree of, and onset of deafness. For example, a child born deaf (congenital deafness), and a child who becomes deaf after the age of fourteen years (post-vocational deafness), may have very different responses to deafness. One becomes deaf before English language acquisition (prelingual deafness), and the other becomes deaf after English language acquisition (postlingual deafness). The prelingually deaf child, having had no experience with English, will depend more heavily on visual stimuli, whereas the postlingually deaf child, having already experienced English language acquisition, may find it more difficult to rely only on visual communication. Fundamental differences between these two children would centre around identification issues. The postlingually deaf child will most likely identify with the hearing community, as he/she became deaf after the age of adolescence:

> those who lose their hearing after adolescence are unlikely to become members of deaf communities. In large part, they do not become members because they do not share the experiences of those who are born deaf or who lose their hearing in childhood (Higgins 33).

On the other hand, a hearing child of deaf parents may identify more strongly with the deaf community in his/her childhood, becoming integrated into the hearing community as he/she grows older. A deaf child born to deaf parents may enter the deaf community earlier in life than a

deaf child born to hearing parents, simply because he/she would have immediate access to the deaf community and to American Sign Language:

> Sign Language is the primary language for the majority of deaf adults, the one used in their everyday lives, outside of work. It is the principal unifying force of the deaf community, the main symbol of identification among its members (Markowitz 2-3).

This consistent exposure to ASL would not occur with deaf children of hearing parents, for they would not have the same community ties. Their parents may sign, but would not necessarily have the same network of deaf friends and history that deaf parents would have. These considerations fundamentally influence these children's attitudes not only toward their deafness, but toward their association with community.

On the other hand, those who become deaf later in life are already fully integrated into the hearing community. They have depended on speech and sound to communicate. To these people, deafness constitutes a loss of function. On the other hand, a person born deaf may not see their deafness as a loss of function, but rather may well see hearing people who do not use sign language as deviating from the norm. Deaf children may wonder why hearing children have lost the use of visual language. As Dr. Harlan Lane, a specialist in the psychology of language and linguistics, describes in his book, *The Mask of Benevolence:*

> Most people who were born deaf or became so early in life. . . and who grew up deaf as part of the deaf community have a different point of view. They see themselves as fundamentally visual people, with their own visual language, social organization, history and mores -- in short, with their own way of being, their own language and culture (5).

Similarly, those born deaf and not part of a deaf community will also align themselves with the way in which they have been brought up and their

perspective will focus on the most dominant culture with which they come into contact. Some of these differences in perspectives are shown most clearly in approaches to language. For how do you overcome the differences in perspectives while still being clear in your approach? As with any culture, there are certain beliefs which do not transfer easily from one culture to another. This is a major difficulty faced in deaf theatre: how to capture the nuances of a language and culture, yet still be accessible to those who do not share the same cultural perspective. An example of the subtle misunderstandings that can arise from differences in language and perspective is shown in the definition of the term "hard of hearing":

> From a hearing point of view, it is better to be hard of hearing than deaf; someone who is "a little hard of hearing" is much less deaf than someone who is "very hard of hearing." Deaf people see things the other way around. When they sign that an acquaintance is A-LITTLE-HARD-OF-HEARING they mean that the person has some of the ways of hearing people but basically is quite deaf. When they sign that someone is VERY-HARD-OF-HEARING, they mean that the person is very much like hearing people, scarcely like deaf people at all" (Lane 5-6).

It is evident that a number of these specific cultural perspectives would be difficult to overcome in translation, not just in theatre but in everyday life. These definitions:

> are not remarkable and isolated examples, but are indications of a larger world of meaning where there are conventions for describing relationships between conditions and identities. Within this world of meaning -- compared to that of English and the world of others -- there is a different alignment, toward a different center (Padden and Humphries 42).

Not only are attitudes toward deafness influenced by one's level of access to other deaf persons, but also by the cultural stereotypes of deafness

to which they have been exposed. For a person who has had no contact with the deaf community, his or her perspectives on deafness might well have to do with the way in which deaf people have been characterized on television, in books and on film. There is a broad base of history which has influenced stereotypes of deafness. In the late nineteenth century, the belief that speech was the only true way to God led to the suppression of public displays of sign language. Speech was believed to elevate the mind, whereas signs were believed to be the crudest representations of thought. In 1880, at the Milan Congress, the president argued:

> Oral speech is the sole power that can rekindle the light God breathed into man when, giving him a soul in a corporeal body, he gave him also a means of understanding, of conceiving, and of expressing himself. . . While, on the one hand, mimic signs are not sufficient to express the fullness of thought, on the other, they enhance and glorify fantasy and all the faculties of the sense of imagination. . . The fantastic language of signs exalts the senses and foments the passions, whereas speech elevates the mind much more naturally, with calm, prudence and truth (Lane 114).

While attitudes have changed toward sign language and physical expression in general, it is important to note that some of the common mistaken beliefs about sign language that are reflected in this quote are still prevalent today. The mistaken belief that signs can only express concrete ideas is reminiscent of signs being insufficient for the expression of "the fullness of thought".

Even stereotyped views of intellectual ability can indirectly affect perceptions of deafness. People who are verbally adept and articulate are more often seen as intelligent than quieter and more taciturn speakers.

> If great flourishes in English are associated with a refined mind, simple, awkward speech and gesticulation are associated with a simple mind. Because language and intellect are so linked in our

> representations of people (we are surprised to hear a towering intellect expressed -- unless by deliberate intent -- in a Southern drawl or in ungrammatical sentences), deafness seems a defect of intellect (Lane 8).

Lane discusses the disruption caused by seemingly "unmatched" elements colliding, such as a profound statement uttered by an inefficient speaker. This disconnectedness is often used for the purposes of humour. For example, characters such as Forrest Gump may well say profound things, but the gap between what they say and how they say it creates a disruption which causes us to laugh because it is so surprising. We are not expecting wisdom from stereotypically "simple" characters. This disconnectedness is carried over to beliefs about deafness and hearing loss. For a hearing person, the term "deaf" constitutes a loss of something, not the presence of anything. Silence is the absence of sound; therefore, "silence is emptiness" (Lane 7). For example, in the 1986 Hallmark Hall of Fame film *Love is Never Silent*, a hearing girl with deaf parents encounters from a friend at her high school graduation this perception of deafness as loss. Her parents wear hearing aids to appear hard of hearing rather than deaf. When one of the girl's friends finds out that the parents are actually deaf, she voices the stereotypical response: "You mean they can't hear anything? No sounds? No music? No voices? Oh, that's awful, that's so sad. I'm sorry, I'm so sorry" (*Love is Never Silent*). Because there are so few representations of deafness seen in film and in theatre, those that are visible tend to be those that feed our perceptions of deafness. The lack of speech is depicted as something to be pitied. However, the irony is that lack of speech is not lack of language. Contrary to mainstream hearing perceptions, American Sign Language (ASL) is as vibrant and complex as any spoken language.

Choice of ASL as Primary Language

Many of the common experiences of the deaf community stem from their attitudes toward language. American Sign Language is a vital part of the deaf community and is the primary means by which its members identify themselves to each other. Because American Sign Language is a major part of deaf culture, a deaf person's choice to use another form of sign system such as signed English may signify a reluctance to enter fully into the deaf culture. Some deaf individuals who have grown up speaking orally, who have been discouraged from using sign language, find the act of reclaiming American Sign Language to be liberating and comfortable, while others find it easier to associate themselves with the hearing community.

Many deaf children, because they are born to hearing parents, grow up with very little exposure to ASL and to other deaf people. Their first experience of language is spoken English. They may be taught speech and lipreading before they are even aware of the existence of American Sign Language. However, it is in the outward expression of ASL that many members of the deaf community experience personal pride. The extreme importance of ASL to the deaf community is due in part to the history of its suppression in the nineteenth century. ASL was not considered appropriate for use in schools and students were forced to speak, and to learn to lipread. When Marlee Matlin accepted her Oscar for her role in *Children of a Lesser God*, she spoke her acceptance speech rather than signing it. For this, she received strong reactions from both the hearing and the deaf communities. The hearing community praised and admired her speech because it revealed her ability to speak. On the other hand, members of the American deaf community criticized her choice:

> . . . in those few halting words she negated the principles of the story she had so brilliantly enacted; she chose symbolically not to accept the award as a member of the deaf community; and she seemed to endorse the view that any amount of [spoken] English is better for deaf people than the most eloquent American Sign Language (Lane 9).

For hearing spectators, it was a display expressing success and arousing admiration, but for the deaf spectators, it was an act which discouraged the use of American Sign Language in favour of spoken English. In an interview on the popular talk show "The Arsenio Hall Show," Matlin defended her choice:

> It was good for my career because a lot of people think I don't speak at all. . .A lot of people in the deaf community were angered because they thought I was representing myself as telling parents of deaf children that those children should learn how to speak just the way I spoke and that wasn't my intention. It was just for myself and I'm proud of what I did.

Her choice aggravated deeply-held issues of group identity and pride in deaf culture. Although she made her choice as an individual, it had profound effects on the deaf community as a whole. Through her visible success in Hollywood and the recognition of the Oscar, Matlin was looked to as a role model and spokesperson for the deaf community. Perhaps if Matlin had accepted her Oscar in ASL she would not have been perceived as turning her back on the deaf community.

Acceptance of a Group Identity

How a deaf individual relates to the deaf community is very important in determining whether or not he/she is a part of that community. Probably the most effective method of cultural transmission in a deaf child's life is the experience of residential school. Although

mainstreaming deaf children into the public school system is becoming common practice, residential schools for the deaf have been integral instruments in the transmission of ASL and cultural values to deaf children. Residential schools are boarding schools, usually publicly-funded, and between 1917 and 1980, each state and province in the U.S. and Canada had at least one "school for the deaf". For many deaf children, residential school is the first time they encounter ASL being used as part of a community. This is especially true of some deaf children of hearing parents, who until school age may have had no contact with other deaf people or with American Sign Language. The dormitories became places of cultural transmission:

> In the dormitories, away from the structured control of the classroom, deaf children are introduced to the social life of deaf people. In the informal dormitory environment children learn not only sign language but the content of the culture. In this way, the schools become hubs of the communities that surround them, preserving for the next generation the culture of earlier generations (Padden and Humphries 5-6).

Many graduates of a particular residential school may return to teach at the school, or may take up residence in the same town as the school. Cultural values are passed through the school and into the surrounding community, so that often when a deaf person identifies the residential school they attended, they are also identifying the values and beliefs with which they grew up. In fact, one of the first things deaf people ask one another, or identify about themselves, is which residential school they attended.

With the mainstreaming of deaf students into public schools, and the general disappearance of residential schools, Gallaudet University, the only liberal arts university for the deaf in North America, has become a centre for cultural transmission not only to the surrounding community, but to

North America. This impact was seen in Gallaudet's "Deaf President Now" movement. In 1987-88, the college was about to appoint a new president, and three candidates were considered: Dr. Harvey Corson, a deaf man and director of the Louisiana School for the Deaf; Dr. I. King Jordan, a deaf man, dean of the faculty of arts and sciences at Gallaudet; and Elisabeth Zinser, a hearing woman, whose training was in nursing and educational psychology (Lane 187). When Zinser was appointed, the students of Gallaudet protested the fact that a woman who had had very little contact with the deaf community would be appointed as president. The protest lasted for four days, during which the students demanded that:

> . . . the board withdraw Dr. Zinser's appointment as president and replace her with a deaf president; second, the chairman of the board must resign; third, the deaf membership of the board must increase to 51 percent; fourth, there must be no reprisals against student protestors (Lane 188).

The protest was widely televised and covered in news all over North America. Much of the awareness was due to media coverage of the protest: "it was probably the most watched event in all of Western deaf history" (Lane 189). Dr. Zinser resigned her position on March 10, 1988, and the protest ended on March 13, 1988, following the announcement that Dr. Jordan was appointed as the first deaf president of Gallaudet. The appointment of Dr. Jordan signified a victory for the expression and influence of group identity. The students at Gallaudet recognized the need for a president who would be a part of the community and understand the community from the inside. Although Dr. Zinser had experience with the deaf, she was not a part of the deaf community.

Adherence to Cultural Norms, Values and Goals

As with any culture, there are certain norms and values which are important to the deaf community, and loyalty to the deaf community is one of the most highly valued:

> . . . this may extend to protectively withholding from hearing people information about the community's language and culture. Members of the deaf community believe, as do members of other cultural minorities, that one should marry within one's minority: marriage with a hearing person is definitely frowned upon. The deaf community collectively values deaf children highly(Lane 18).

The values which the deaf culture upholds are sanctity of language, pride in community, and the importance of deaf children to the longevity of their community. Because it may be difficult for some deaf children, especially of hearing parents, to have contact with the deaf community, special care is taken to seek out and support them so they may be exposed to deaf culture. Teaching deaf culture to deaf children is a way to secure transmission of cultural values and norms. One of the biggest struggles in deaf theatre is upholding the values and norms expected by members of the deaf community. What is valued in the culture is approached from different perspectives, depending on prior experience with deafness. Whatever the perspective, it is necessary to have an overview of deaf culture in order to pursue a study of deaf theatre, because a deaf theatre company is an interesting microcosm of cultures. Usually there are members of the deaf community, the hearing community, and the theatre community. How all of these people interact, and determine to what extent language and culture will be used to teach or enhance deaf theatre performance, can largely determine how commercially and critically successful the company will be.

Chapter Two: What is Deaf Theatre?

Deaf language, culture, and community all contribute to a uniquely deaf perspective. Cultural activities of the deaf reflect the beauty and complexity of the language, the values and principles of the culture, and the experiences of the community. Deaf theatre was created as an attempt to bring together those elements on stage, not only for artistic purposes, but also to bring awareness to the deaf community. Deaf theatre is visual theatre which combines elements of sign language, mime and voice to create a distinct performance style. While most of the studies written on the style and development of deaf theatre focus on the performance style of the National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD) in the United States, there are many deaf theatre companies which present radically different styles, but are still considered "deaf theatre". I will attempt to clarify the term "deaf theatre" in order to provide a starting point to discuss the National Theatre of the Deaf in the United States, and the Canadian Theatre of the Deaf in Canada. While both companies bear the name "theatre of the deaf" their performance styles and material have been quite different. This variance in style and content can prove to be frustrating in establishing a vocabulary and context within which to place deaf theatre.

It is not sufficient to find a simple dictionary definition of deaf theatre which can then be applied to all performances which fit its criteria. Rather, in order to document the semantic drift of the term "deaf theatre," I will undertake an historical exercise, to establish a generalized definition. The term "deaf theatre" is at once descriptive and problematic, because the term itself suggests a theatre experience which caters to the deaf public or is performed by deaf performers. While this description may be somewhat

manageable, it is in no way sufficient to describe the many variations of form referred to by this single term.

Three books which have covered a great deal of ground in providing guidelines for defining deaf theatre are: *Sign Language Theatre and Deaf Theatre: New Definitions and Directions,* written in 1976 by Dorothy S. Miles and Louie J. Fant; "Deaf Theatre Performance: An Aristotelean Approach," an MA thesis written in 1988 by Rusalyn Andrews; and "Deaf Theatre in America: Practices and Principles," a Ph.D. thesis written in 1989 by Donald Bangs. I will look at the definitions presented in each work in order to flesh out a framework for further exploration into the style of deaf theatre as exemplified by the National Theatre of the Deaf and the Canadian Theatre of the Deaf.

In the 1970s, the National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD) was beginning to gain recognition because of its extensive touring, and its unique performance style. The NTD defied known and accepted forms of conventional spoken theatre, for it used a combination of elements of sign language, mime and the spoken voice. It could not be considered strictly mime or gesture-based theatre, although it was influenced and enriched by both. Performances by the NTD exploit conversational ASL to give it a more visually pleasing expression. Critics and audiences alike were presented with the problem of creating a vocabulary suitable to discussing this type of theatre. American Sign Language was just beginning to become recognized, and the hearing public had many mistaken beliefs about deafness and ASL. Nobody knew what deaf theatre was, and reviews and other critiques seemed to focus more on the beauty of sign language than on the content of the plays. There was confusion over what type of theatre was being seen. Was it the image-based theatre of a Peter Brook,

or the mime of a Marcel Marceau? Because of this confusion, and the excitement, surrounding the National Theatre of the Deaf, interest in establishing a vocabulary began to develop. Terms such as "theatre of the deaf", "deaf drama", "deaf theatre", "sign language theatre" and "silent theatre" were all used to describe the style of the NTD (Miles and Fant 4). To further confuse critics, other theatre companies were emerging which also used a combination of sign language, mime and the spoken voice. The performance styles of these companies varied and it was difficult for a single, unified definition of this new form to develop.

The seminal work on deaf theatre, *Sign Language Theatre and Deaf Theatre: New Definitions and Directions*, was written by Miles and Fant in 1976, and it became a resource for those interested in categorizing and defining deaf theatre. The authors sought to eliminate some of the confusion between terms by providing two specific categories in which to place different performance styles: Sign Language Theatre; and Deaf Theatre. These categories can be further broken down into the material that was being performed, and the audience that was being targeted for each performance.

Sign Language Theatre

The first type of theatre Miles and Fant define is Sign Language Theatre. This term is still used today to describe a theatre production which uses signs to visually enrich a performance. A Sign Language Theatre performance as defined by Miles and Fant would be:

> . . . any production which begins with a text originally written for spoken theatre. . . or with selected items of literature (poetry or prose), and arranges this work for simultaneous presentation in

> spoken language and in the sign language used by deaf persons in the country or locality (4-5).

Most Sign Language Theatre performances do not use American Sign Language, but a sign system closer to SEE sign or Signed English. The material used in Sign Language theatre is an established piece of literature, most likely one already familiar to the hearing community. The literature is then taken and transliterated, which is a process that involves replacing each English word with a sign. Transliteration does not involve a translation from English to American Sign Language, rather it "remains in the same language, merely substituting a different set of symbols for the usual ones" (Miles and Fant 7). Transliteration ignores the grammatical properties of American Sign Language and creates instead a system of symbolic representation. By replacing each English word with a symbol, the performance becomes a visual representation of the written text, not an interpretation of that text. The work is presented simultaneously in spoken English and sign language, but there is no ASL interpretation provided, and no attempt is made to explore the deaf cultural perspective. The function of the sign language element of the play is solely artistic. While Sign Language Theatre may indeed be a beautiful marriage of sign and voice, "there is little else to identify the experience of sign language theatre with the deaf culture" (Andrews 37). The sign language is not used for communication but for illumination.

Sign Language Theatre can be very effective in providing emphasis for elements in the play that need to be stressed. It is spoken theatre, with an added visual component which can be used as an ironic counterpoint to the action of the play. For example, in a production of *The Elephant Man* put on by the Equity Showcase Theatre in Ontario, each

character had two performers, one hearing and one deaf, one speaking and one signing, who mirrored each other throughout the performance (Hoeppner). This type of performance provides simultaneous narration along with a different perspective on the action. This method would also be effective in showing a character's divided nature, such as Iago in *Othello,* or Dr. Jekyll in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. The actors become different facets of the same character, emphasizing characteristics through speech and sign. The sign language is a convention, and the fact that the characters sign does not need to be justified aesthetically.

Defining such a performance as "deaf theatre" is misleading, as the production is not geared toward a deaf audience and does not necessarily use deaf actors. Although a Sign Language Theatre performance may exclude the deaf audience, Miles and Fant assert that it is still a useful undertaking for a hearing audience as it may increase "public acceptance of sign language . . . by demonstrating its beauty, versatility, and creative aspects" (26). The hearing audience members who attend a Sign Language Theatre performance are being exposed to a sign system for the purpose of artistic enjoyment, but unfortunately, as most Sign Language Theatre performances are not done in American Sign Language, the awareness thus acquired may be misleading. Audience members may leave such a performance having had their mistaken belief confirmed that American Sign Language is simply a representation of English, adhering to its grammar and syntax, when in fact this is not so. It is important to emphasize again that "ASL is an independent language with its own grammar and its own vocabulary, and both are unrelated to English" (Markowitz 5).

Deaf Theatre

The second type of theatre that Miles and Fant describe is "Deaf Theatre". A Deaf Theatre performance is concerned with the use of sign language as communication first, and artistic medium second (Miles and Fant 6). This is a major departure from the purpose of Sign Language Theatre which is concerned mainly with artistic representation. Deaf Theatre seeks to establish a style accessible to both the deaf community and the hearing community. In Deaf Theatre, as in Sign Language Theatre, the material chosen is usually conventional hearing plays such as *Gianni Schichii, Cyrano de Bergerac* and *The Dybbuk,* all of which have been performed at the National Theatre of the Deaf. However, even though both use conventional plays, the ways in which the plays are presented are quite different. While Sign Language Theatre uses transliteration, Deaf Theatre adapts or translates the material into American Sign Language. The translation process involves maintaining the inherent meaning of the text within the structure of American Sign Language. A play by Shakespeare, for example:

> . . .is notoriously difficult to translate, not only because of its often archaic syntax and usage, but also because Shakespeare so often plays with language, with the multiple meanings and fine shadings of words and images. Finding just the right signs to reflect these subtleties [is] a formidable project (Walters 2).

For productions of Shakespeare, such as the production of *Pericles* at the 1993 Illinois Shakespeare Festival, translation into American Sign Language can prove to be frustrating. Peter Cook, a deaf actor who played the leading role in this production, described the translation process:

> Shakespeare made his language so beautiful. . . Sometimes, in order to make a line clear, in order to make sure that I am signing what he

> has written, I have to resort to 'regular' ASL. But it frustrates me that the sign is not beautiful -- it says what Shakespeare said, but in a way that doesn't reflect the beauty of the writing. It's too plain. This frustrates me. I always try to seek a balance between the literal meaning and its underlying beauty (qtd. in Walters 2).

This is a frustration encountered when translating any established work into American Sign Language. While most deaf theatre productions play with signs in order to extend their meaning into a rhythmic poetry, Cook discusses the problem of clarity. While ASL can be extended with mime or pantomime, sometimes in the translation process it is necessary to use conversational ASL to maintain the clarity of the source text.

While some conventional theatre texts may not lend themselves well to translation due to specific language devices such as puns and double meanings, many texts can be adapted to suit a deaf perspective. Plays with themes of isolation, communication, identity, and power lend themselves well to the deaf experience. In order to include a deaf cultural perspective, a conventional text may be adapted in order to emphasize the relationship between the original text and the experiences of the deaf. For example, *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams could be adapted with Laura as a deaf character who deals with the same issues of isolation, identity, and miscommunication. Adaptation involves:

> . . . changing the original English text to render it more signable and to eliminate such things as long, discursive passages that cannot be translated visually; and altering or introducing situations, characters or physical devices in order to make a production more visual (Miles and Fant 8).

Material for Deaf Theatre may also include original work written by deaf playwrights. These texts are not necessarily written by one playwright, but instead may come out of the improvisations of a troupe of actors sharing their experiences. This was the technique used to develop

the successful performance by the National Theatre of the Deaf of *My Third Eye*, a series of vignettes documenting the deaf experience. However, such original written texts are hard to find. Because American Sign Language does not have a written form, these "texts" are usually written in English gloss. The gloss is the closest approximation to ASL in written form. Work continues to be done to develop new ways in which to document scripts in ASL.

The material presented by Deaf Theatre is intended to be accessible to both a deaf and hearing audience. Not only is the performance done in American Sign Language, but it is simultaneously interpreted into spoken English by hearing performers who serve as narrators. The hearing audience is not only gaining awareness of American Sign Language, but also of the deaf cultural perspective. For Deaf Theatre seeks:

> . . .to entertain and enlighten both deaf and hearing audiences with realistic portrayals of the lives of deaf persons, or with real or imaginary representations drawn from the deaf person's unique perception of the world; to provide both deaf and hearing playwrights with models from which to develop further creations and to bring to the deaf public a theatre with which they can truly identify (Miles and Fant 6).

Unlike Sign Language Theatre, Deaf Theatre is a tool for communication and recognition. Simply by employing American Sign Language, the beauty of the communication adds to the visual richness of the production. The language is exploited for its pantomimic and poetic elements in order to saturate the production with layers of meaning. Deaf Theatre has become an experimental ground for developing new ways of looking at sign language. There has been a conscious analysis of the form and the structure of the language, which has opened up possibilities for poetic and dramatic language. Just as English words are combined to create more

expressive ideas, so elements of signs are combined to create a more succinct and poetic translation. For example, a poem in English uses devices such as alliteration, assonance, and rhyme. Similarly, a poem in ASL uses handshape, location, and movement.

Deaf Theatre, as defined by Miles and Fant, is concerned with the portrayal of believable deaf characters and with subject matter readily accessible to a deaf audience. These concerns need to be met in the production itself. Although a Sign Language Theatre piece may well use sign language, it is not considered a necessary communication tool for the characters; it is simply an added visual level. In Sign Language Theatre, the characters are not necessarily deaf; therefore, it is up to the audience to accept the convention that all of the characters sign. However, in a Deaf Theatre production, not all of the characters necessarily sign, and if they do, it is because it is an important part of their character, not merely an artistic device.

In a Deaf Theatre production, there are often onstage narrators who interpret the lines of the deaf characters into spoken English. These narrators are integral to the action of the play, and take part as minor characters such as chorus members. The National Theatre of the Deaf developed the technique of integrating narrators into the action of the play. The use of onstage narrators is an effective device because it has:

> 1) created a narration which is integrated dramatically,
> 2) encouraged other hearing actors to become involved in the field; and
> 3) established a style with the hearing theatre-going public (Boose 43).

Because most cues are given visually in a Deaf Theatre performance, the voice actors must "think of language in different ways -- and. . . to

manifest it with body and eyes. Voice actors must also become aware of using other senses, either simultaneously or singly" (Baldwin 165). While the voice actors speak for the signing actors, they are also responsible to play minor roles and be aware of visual cues. It is important to emphasize the distinction between narrators-as-characters in Deaf Theatre, and interpreters in spoken theatre. The narrators in a Deaf Theatre production are members of the permanent ensemble of the theatre. They are involved in the entire rehearsal process and are integral to contributing to the spoken element of a Deaf Theatre performance. Interpreters used in conventional spoken theatre, on the other hand, are employed to make the performance accessible to deaf audience members, and are there specifically and only for that purpose. They usually spend a maximum of only a few days with the company to become familiar with the play and the production. For the most part, interpreters are not actors. Usually, a spoken theatre company will provide one or two "interpreted performances" of a play for the local deaf community. By contrast, in a Deaf Theatre production, all performances have narrators, as they are a part of the permanent ensemble.

The fundamental differences between Sign Language Theatre and Deaf Theatre as defined by Miles and Fant lie in the target audience and in the material used. These two criteria for defining forms of deaf theatre are foundational to studies which have been done more recently. For example, Rusalyn Andrews in her 1988 MA thesis "Deaf Theatre Performance: An Aristotelean Approach" builds on the work begun by Miles and Fant in 1976. She narrows Miles and Fant's definitions of Deaf Theatre to two subgroups: "Theatre *for* the Deaf" and "Theatre *of* the Deaf".

Theatre for the Deaf

Theatre *for* the Deaf involves many of the elements of Deaf Theatre as defined by Miles and Fant, but the target audience is more specific. Theatre for the Deaf is theatre performed for a deaf audience by a deaf company, and "any hearing audience members would automatically need to understand American Sign Language and have an awareness of if not an allegiance to the Deaf Culture" (Andrews 39). This is truly a theatre for the deaf community, using their language and addressing their issues. The main difference between Theatre for the Deaf as defined by Andrews, and Deaf Theatre as defined by Miles and Fant, is that Theatre for the Deaf rarely provides spoken interpretation. The material used in Theatre for the Deaf is much like that used for Deaf Theatre, in that it is either written by a deaf playwright, or adapted from a conventional play so as to incorporate the deaf experience.

Theatre for the Deaf is particularly concerned with nurturing new deaf playwrights. Because there are a very limited number of playscripts written by and for the deaf community, most of the plays performed are taken from the pool of conventional hearing plays, then adapted to suit a deaf cultural perspective. Samuel J. Zachary maintains that plays written for Theatre for the Deaf are:

> . . .created solely by hearing- impaired authors, none of whom can claim the long heritage of playwriting and theatre production informing the work of hearing authors. Those theatre for the deaf playscripts now written have indisputable merit, but not particularly as exciting or innovative theatrical pieces (qtd. in Andrews 41).

Theatre of the Deaf

Andrews defines Theatre *of* the Deaf as theatre which:

> goes beyond sign language theatre by either initiating original scripts or translating existing scripts from English into sign language and altering them to reflect those elements integral to Deaf Culture (Andrews 37).

Much like Theatre *for* the Deaf, Theatre *of* the Deaf seeks to make sure that "deaf issues are incorporated into the framework of the action" (Andrews 37). The primary difference between the two types of theatre is in the target audience. Theatre *of* the Deaf seeks to be accessible to both a hearing and deaf audience. Because of this, simultaneous interpretation is provided for both deaf and hearing members of the audience. I will undertake in Chapter Three a detailed study of the National Theatre of the Deaf, which is one of the most successful theatres of the deaf in North America.

There are some general criteria that are evident in most productions considered theatre of the deaf. Although Miles and Fant and Andrews provide useful definitions of terms associated with Deaf Theatre, this theatre form can be clarified further. In his Ph.D. thesis "Deaf Theatre in America: Practices and Principles," Richard Bangs discusses seven criteria by which to identify a deaf theatre piece. Bangs' criteria cover audience, material and performance considerations.

Bangs' first criterion is: "two separate but integrated performances in sign language and voice take place simultaneously"(Bangs 327). The text is simultaneously performed in sign language and spoken verbally. Having

to interpret the lines of the deaf performer can prove challenging for a translator, who is trying to preserve the meaning of the script in both American Sign Language and in spoken English, while at the same time maintaining the correct speed and pace. In order for this to be effective, synchronization between the signs and the spoken words must be achieved so that one is not trailing the other and thus a unity of visual and spoken text can be both seen and heard. Just as a hearing dramatist is concerned with the text in terms of the way words sound, so the translator or translators are concerned with the task of seeking "words that are expressed by the deaf with signs that are graceful information and movement in space, and which convey the thought most beautifully and powerfully to the eye" (Boose 27).

In his second criterion, Bangs insists that in Deaf Theatre, "the sign language performance is the central feature of the overall performance" (Bangs 328). Therefore, most of the preparation for the production is centered on making the sign language understandable, and making sure that the meaning of the text is inherent in the sign language translation. The pre-eminence of the sign language portion of the performance affects the emphasis put on the actors during the performance. The signing actors take precedence over the speaking actors, so that the sign language element of the performance is highlighted. Because of this, the presence of the voice narrators is diminished by various means. The narrators may be background 'extras', or used as props such as tables, trees or archways, or taken off the stage altogether (Bangs 328).

Regardless of their placement, the voice narrators perform a vital task in a Deaf Theatre production. They significantly affect the understanding of the hearing members of the audience and provide one of

the fundamental vehicles for meaning through the spoken word and its subtle intonations and inflections. In approaching the material, whether going from a collaboration of deaf actors creating a piece in American Sign Language to which spoken English is then added by hearing actors, or beginning with an English text and then translating it into American Sign Language, "the goal of rehearsal is an integration of signed and voiced performances" (Bangs 327-8).

In his third criterion, Bangs outlines some aids for the actors performing in the production. In Deaf Theatre, "deaf actors perform in sign language and hearing actors perform through speech, with a few exceptions" (Bangs 328). Bangs is referring here to using the actors' strengths in order to improve the performance. The medium through which they perform, whether spoken English or ASL, must be one in which they have a high skill level (Bangs 67). (This is quite different from Sign Language Theatre, which can be performed by actors with no knowledge of American Sign Language.) Because in Deaf Theatre, the actors are so involved in the scripting process, lack of skill in the knowledge of translation would be an obvious hindrance. As well, for practical means, while a hearing actor playing the role of a deaf character might lose rhythm, "Deaf performers are not confused or thrown off by hearing the voiced narration in English and can effectively control the rhythm and pace of the central sign language performance" (Bangs 329). Much rehearsal time would be spent perfecting the synchronization of the signed and spoken lines (Bangs 328).

According to Bangs' fourth criterion, it is necessary that "the performance addresses itself to two audiences, one deaf and one hearing"(Bangs 328). Clarity in presentation must be achieved for both

groups. Audible voicing without being distracting, and signs which are visible and understandable to the audience, are important in order to make the production comprehensible to the audience (Bangs 328-9). This criterion has caused much controversy in the area of deaf theatre. While a company's mandate may specify equal accessibility for both deaf and hearing audience members, one of the two groups is usually targeted. For example, the production of *The Iliad,* adapted from the established literary work, was problematic for some deaf audience members because "adaptations based upon familiar literary sources provided hearing theatre-goers with a frame of reference which was not available to their Deaf counterparts, due to reading difficulties or lack of access to television or film versions of the literary work" (Bangs 143). In order to reach both audiences, the production must be sensitive to the needs of both groups of audience members.

In his fifth criterion, Bangs goes on to stress that "Deaf Theatre is a language-based theatre"(Bangs 329) which emphasizes its focus first on providing communication and understanding, and second on creating visual artistry. Because language is such an important part of the deaf culture, it is analyzed and explored in their theatre. "Acceptance of ASL as a language signals acceptance of deafness and its resulting lifestyle" (Andrews 29). It is not sufficient simply to use a sign system, as Sign Language Theatre does. Deaf theatre must therefore obey the rules of ASL, taking into consideration its linguistic and nonlinguistic elements. Deaf Theatre manipulates American Sign Language and combines it with mime, dance, and movement much in the same way that speech can become song or poetry through intonation and changes of vocal or structural elements. The voice is manipulated and extended into song, just as the

hands are manipulated with mime to create a rhythmic movement of signs. When used in combination, mime and sign become a unit of poeticized language expanding the nature of the sign to a new dramatic form (Andrews 171).

In Bangs' sixth criterion, he looks at the content of the material used, stressing that "the subject matter for Deaf Theatre productions is surprisingly unlimited" (Bangs 330). Deaf Theatre is not simply limited to scripts which are written by deaf playwrights, or conventional theatre pieces which hint at a deaf cultural perspective. The range of plays which can be performed by a Deaf Theatre Group includes Shakespeare's *Pericles* and Gertrude Stein's *Four Saints in Three Acts.* The quality of translation or adaptation, and the innovation of staging and direction, play a large part in determining how well a particular production will be received and understood.

Finally, Bangs stresses that there is "a wide range of staging techniques. . . possible with Deaf Theatre productions, although care must be taken to ensure that signed and voiced performances can be understood by deaf and hearing audiences alike" (Bangs 330). In Deaf Theatre, the body becomes not only an agent for language, but is also used to create vivid stage pictures. As well, while Deaf Theatre employs both hearing and deaf actors, it is not only the hearing actors who use their voices. Deaf actors also use vocalized sounds in order to illuminate or emphasize the physical action of the play. At times, they may accompany their vocalizations by foot stomping and hand clapping, in order to create an unique accompaniment to the action (McClelland and Gremion 36). Many unique and innovative staging techniques can be used, as long as the meaning and understandability of the text are not diminished.

Sign Language Theatre, Deaf Theatre, Theatre of the Deaf and Theatre for the Deaf are general categories which encompass the evolving deaf theatrical form. The National Theatre of the Deaf embodies many of the techniques and elements of these categories. A more detailed study of the NTD is now necessary to push the definition of deaf theatre further in order to explore specific examples and illustrations of many of the ideas in this chapter. Because the NTD was the first professional deaf theatre in North America to become internationally recognized, many of the definitions previously explored were based on their distinct style. Subsequent attempts at deaf theatre, such as the Canadian Theatre of the deaf in 1976, sought to emulate the style and success of the NTD. Now that we have established a general overview of the styles of deaf theatre, it is important to narrow the focus to specific companies which claim to be deaf theatres.

Chapter Three: The National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD)

The National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD) was established in 1968 in Chester, Connecticut and is still in operation today. In its history,

> . . .the NTD had performed in all fifty American states, an accomplishment still unequaled by any other professional theatre organization. The company had also conducted twenty-six national tours, enjoyed two Broadway runs, toured Europe twelve times, and traveled throughout Asia and Australia three times, giving over 6,000 performances on six continents and appearing in more than thirty countries on twenty-eight international tours. . . (Zachary 63).

The NTD was one of the first deaf theatre companies to be recognized internationally for their unique performance style which uses deaf and hearing actors, sign language and the spoken word, as well as innovative stage pictures. These elements, combined in polished performances, excited the theatrical community and soon the NTD was hosting renowned actors such as Jason Robards and directors such as Peter Brook. The NTD also became the model for many deaf theatre companies, such as the CTD in Canada. In order to explore how the CTD eventually failed, we must establish the context of the model which it sought to emulate.

The success of the NTD cannot be attributed to one aspect of their development, but is the result of a combination of elements which together assured the success of the company. The NTD was formed at a time ripe for theatrical innovation, with people committed to a new style of theatre and respected for their accomplishments, with a commitment to training, touring and success. These elements together are the basis for the success of the NTD, and can provide a matrix by which to compare the progress of

the development of the CTD, to explore and analyze what could have been done differently to establish a national theatre of the deaf in Canada.

History

Much of the success that the National Theatre of the Deaf enjoys today is due to the timing of the venture and the commitment of those involved in establishing the company. These factors have given the NTD a solid foundation on which to build a theatre company that has now been in operation for 30 years. At the time of its establishment, sign language was still struggling to be accepted as a valid language in educational settings, and the NTD was formed by people who saw potential in the theatrical use of the language. As well, Gallaudet was involved in mounting plays which hinted at the style of deaf theatre and which exposed the talent of deaf actors, directors and designers. The National Theatre of the Deaf began as an idea in the minds of Anne Bancroft and David Hays. In 1958, Anne Bancroft, who was appearing in the Broadway production of *The Miracle Worker,* and Arthur Penn, who directed the production, "became excited [about] the possibilities for theatre of the Deaf" (McClendon qtd. in Bangs 57). In her research for *The Miracle Worker,* Bancroft had been exposed to American Sign Language and was intrigued by its possibilities for the stage. In 1961, Bancroft and Penn, along with Dr. Edna Levine, a psychiatrist with experience of deaf clients, asked Mary Switzer, director of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, for funding for a deaf theatre production on Broadway. Due to "lack of a sponsoring organization and the limited nature of the project" (Bangs 58), this production was not approved. However, the seed was planted, and that same year, Bancroft invited David

Hays, a Broadway designer and co-founder with George C. White of the O'Neill Theatre Centre in Waterford, Connecticut, to see a production of *Our Town* at Gallaudet University. Gallaudet's production solidified Bancroft's excitement about the form of deaf theatre, and exposed Hays to the possibilities of a deaf theatre as well. Bancroft and Hays were "entranced by the artistic potential of visual language" (Zachary 55). They wanted to bring this new style of theatre out of Gallaudet to a wider audience. Hays then applied to the RSA for a planning grant, under the auspices of the O'Neill Theatre Centre. This grant was awarded, and resulted in bringing a Gallaudet University production of *Iphigenia in Aulis* to the O'Neill Theatre Centre in July 1966. After the success of this production, Hays again approached the RSA and other funding agencies with a proposal for a three-year grant. This grant was awarded, and the NTD was established in 1966 as a result of the grant of $331,000 from the RSA (Bangs 59-60).

Although much of the funding for the NTD was from the Rehabilitative Service Administration, Hays wanted to break out of the idea of deaf theatre as rehabilitation. His approach for the theatre did not involve a great knowledge of deaf culture or language, but he knew that the language had incredible artistic potential and he wanted to translate that to the theatre. Hays wanted the focus to be on the artistic form of Theatre of the Deaf and on producing theatre of quality and beauty which could have an impact through the artistic power of sign language. Hays, despite his lack of knowledge of deaf culture,

> . . . proposed some visionary ideas at a time when only a handful of people accepted ASL as a language, when Deaf people's career choices were limited and when the only Deaf Theatre works were

> college or amateur productions attended almost entirely by deaf audiences (Bangs 60-61).

Hays wanted to open up the potential of deaf theatre to reach hearing audiences. At the National Theatre of the Deaf, the hearing world was able to experience the beauty of sign language in performance, and the deaf world was able to see an artistic form which used deaf performers and their own language. However, one of the most frequent criticisms of the NTD from the deaf community is that it has gone too far in trying to be accessible to the hearing community, so much so that it has left the deaf audience out altogether. This is partially due to the evolution of the NTD's performance style.

Performance Style

The performance style of the NTD most closely adheres to the definition of deaf theatre provided by Bangs in his doctoral dissertation. David Hays described their performance style as

> . . . heavily influenced by the type of physicalization commonly associated with pantomime, commedia dellarte, and slapstick comedy. 'We can be no better mimes or slapstick comedians than hearing actors,' Hays stressed: 'We must concentrate on plays and literary works that are deeply rooted in language' (qtd. in Zachary 57).

The NTD is committed to exploring the poetic possibilities of American Sign Language in order to find a "linguistic form appropriate for the theatre." This exploration involved magnifying signs so they could be seen from the back of a theatre, and manipulating signs to render ASL as a poetic language more dramatic than its everyday conversational form (Andrews 173). The NTD developed a language style which provided "a saturation of poetic language that is not typical of common conversation. . .

but is used in ways consistent with the rules, structure, and capabilities of the language" (Andrews 173).

One of the leaders in establishing this poetic language was Bernard Bragg, a prominent deaf actor. Before coming to the NTD, Bragg had had a professional career as an actor and had studied mime in Paris with Marcel Marceau. He also appeared in clubs, and on television in a program called *The Quiet Man* (Bangs 68). Bragg brought a great deal of knowledge of performance to the NTD and was an important collaborator in determining their stylistic concerns. He also contributed to the company as an actor and teacher. The sign-mime created by Bernard Bragg examines the possibility of conceptual language which can extend beyond one level of meaning to many by manipulating signs and body movement. Sign-mime, at its best, creates another level of meaning which can be startlingly effective. There are various possibilities within the "visual components of sign mime [to] allow deaf actors to smoothly vary modes of communication from culturally language-bound expression to universally-comprehended mimic expression" (Zachary 59). An example of this is Bragg's use of "visual vernacular." Even a hearing audience member who knows no American Sign Language will be able to recognize the mimetic extension of some of the signs which have a universal element.

Bragg's "visual vernacular" is based on camera angles used in film. Bragg instructed his students in the use of film techniques such as the close-up and long shot. Bernard Bragg describes his use of "visual vernacular", which:

> . . . follows the cinematic approach; in other words, I simulate what a camera can do -- close-ups, long shots, zooming, panning, high angle and low angle shots, slow motion, and fast motion. The

> performer remains all the time within the film frame, so to speak, presenting a montage of crosscuts and cutaway views (Bragg 96).

For example, in film, if the scene is of someone cutting down a tree, there may be a close-up of the cutter's face, followed by a long shot of the tree, then the cutter's face, then a close-up of an ax striking a tree, then the tree falling. In Bragg's "visual vernacular," which uses a combination of sign-mime and film technique, the camera angles shown in the film can be established simply with the use of the performer's body. The signer signs "tree", to establish the object, thus giving a close-up of the "tree"; then the signer abandons the tree for a long-shot which involves making the motion of cutting down the tree by swinging an imaginary ax; then the signer returns to the close-up of the "tree", but this time the tree would be moving as if it were hit; then a long-shot of swinging the ax; and finally a zoom into the tree falling. By using this technique, Bragg extends the signs for "tree" and "ax" and "cutting-down" to become a mimetic extension of the signs, creating a story more visually exciting than regular ASL. This technique does not rely on the receiver's knowledge of sign-language, but rather on the receiver's recognition of the mimetic extension of the sign. Bragg also taught a class in sign-mime which involved transforming the students' "'visual voices' from ordinary conversational sign language into a uniquely theatrical form: " . . . Bragg explored ways by which signs could be enlarged, deleted, exaggerated or adapted for theatrical situations" (Bangs 68). Bragg's contributions to the style of deaf theatre revolutionized the use of sign language in production. Bragg was a significant contributor to many of the innovative techniques subsequently used by the NTD.

His innovation used language in new ways, and Hays was very aware that the style of the NTD could become simply a showcase for American Sign Language, and that it

> . . .cannot achieve any . . . other goals without meeting the standards set by centuries of fine professional work. We cannot create pride, or good jobs, or good teachers unless our work passes, without condescension. . . the most exacting tests of the commercial theatre world (qtd. in Zachary 55).

Unfortunately, most of the tests of the commercial theatre world involve money. In order to be financially successful, the NTD needed a broad audience base which would have to consist largely of hearing patrons. To be accessible to these patrons, they needed to make their performances as artistically pleasing and innovative, as well as comprehensible, as possible. There is a great deal of variation within sign-mime, moving from conversational sign language to body pictures, or a combination of both, creating a heightened theatrical vernacular. At times, taking ASL out of the realm of everyday conversation and expanding it poetically obscured the ability of deaf audience members to understand the play. Much of the struggle for accessibility is played out in the translation process. Hays desired a theatre "deeply rooted in language", but to take a literary play and translate it into ASL without alienating the deaf audience proved to be a challenge for the NTD, and still remains a challenge.

Translation and Adaptation

The National Theatre of the Deaf has performed pieces such as Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*, Dylan Thomas' *Under Milkwood*, Moliere's *The Miser*, and Lewis Carroll's *Jabberwocky*. Each of these works was written by a hearing writer. The process for adapting these plays is one of the

unique aspects of the NTD and has evolved over the years to a collective approach to translation. Each piece must be translated into American Sign Language or sign-mime. Originally, the process at the NTD started with a translator who brought the translated work to the actors, and then:

> . . .since the rehearsal period was short, usually three weeks, the translator assisted individual performers in developing their own sign language renditions. . .the translator helped create the appropriate sign language renditions of the English script which suited the nature of the work, whether stylized or natural, realistic or artistic. The translator also created signs for words which were not readily translated into sign language. . . finally, the translator assisted in cutting away extraneous dialogue (Bangs 160-161).

As the actors became familiar with the translation process, the NTD no longer used translators, but instead had a "Sign Master" who oversaw the translation process. As the cast worked through the translation in rehearsal, the Sign Master was available for consultation (Bangs 161). In the translation process, creative collaboration between director, performer and sign language interpreter was integral in creating a coherent and understandable piece. It is the director, however, who has the final say on the method of translation. Because American Sign Language has no written form, the translation must be written in an English gloss which only provides a close approximation of the signs to be used. More often than not, the translation process also serves as a time for memorization, with the glosses used for reminders only.

Another consideration in the translation and rehearsal process at the National Theatre of the Deaf is the use of hearing actors who provide the voice narration to accompany the sign language. Those providing narration must work closely with the deaf actors in order to synchronize their speaking with the pace of the deaf actors' signs. A missed line on the

part of one actor could result in an uneven performance until the line is recovered. Unlike a hearing theatre performance, it is not only up to one person to recover the line but up to two facets of the same character: the actor providing the voice narration, and the actor signing. Because the two actors are so interdependent for cues and for synchronization, rehearsal time is spent on devising ways for both the hearing and deaf actors to be cued. Unlike conventional theatre, in which the actor hears his/her cue, the deaf actor must receive that information in another way. Cues must generally be created visually by the actors, although the company has also used set pieces designed by French sculptor Francois Baschet specifically to give off vibrations which also serve to provide cues to the actors. Baschet made these pieces for three purposes: "to provide accompaniment for the silent performances of the actors and simultaneous narration; to serve as vibrational cues which would be felt by the deaf performers; and to provide decor" (Bangs 72). Innovations such as these, which serve multiple functions, are important in this type of production. For example, if a deaf actor forgets a line, the narrator who speaks the same line may not be in a position to see that the deaf actor has missed the line, and that may result in a lag time between the end of the signed line and the spoken line. In such a case, the cue may be given in another way. For example, mirrors may be used in the wings to reflect the signs or the lip movements of the actors. As with any theatre performance, preparation in rehearsals would eliminate many of these problems.

Professional Training School

Possibly the most important element contributing to the success of the NTD was the establishment of a Professional Training School for all

aspects of deaf theatre. In 1966, because the style of deaf theatre was so new, and because the only training ground for deaf actors was in amateur college productions at Gallaudet, it was necessary to equip the theatre personnel with the skills needed to participate in an NTD production. Although the theatre was an artistic endeavour, it also became educational and benefited from continuing funding and from student tuition. In 1966, when NTD began, no training school specifically in the style of deaf theatre was available. The NTD was aware of the need for such a training school, and in 1967 established the Professional School for Deaf Theatre Personnel, a summer school program which taught all aspects of theatrical production to both deaf and hearing performers. The first summer school took place over a three-week period, and during that time, fourteen theatre professionals, both deaf and hearing, were brought in to supervise classes and give workshops to thirty-six deaf performers (Bangs 65). The students were instructed in a wide range of classes in acting, Eastern movement, dance, directing, theatre history, fencing, tumbling, design, and experimentation with film techniques (Zachary 55). The NTD summer school provided an intense program which became a place for experimentation with language and technique. David Hays summarized the need for the school:

> The school is our annual starting point: Here the company trains; deaf people interested in community theatre work also train; and now a limited number of "hearing" actors have been brought into the program. We select the new company members if needed and in the quieter pre-rehearsal atmosphere, delve deeper into the seemingly endless possibilities of the style of dramatic language (qtd. in Bangs 66).

The summer school subsequently expanded to five weeks in order to accommodate a more diverse range of courses such as costume, design and

lighting, to prepare the students for all aspects of theatre training. The NTD's summer school is still the only one of its kind in North America, and today, participants include deaf and hearing people from all over the world. For example, at the 1996 summer school, there were participants from Shanghai, China and Sundbyberg, Sweden (DTC Newsletter 11). Ed Waterstreet, a deaf actor, summarizes his experience at the summer school:

> I remember we were all so awed and everything went over our heads. Bernard Bragg was teaching sign mime, we took dance, tumbling, acting. . . a whole day's schedule. . . We had a dance instructor from New York, a good and knowledgeable teacher and I must have lost twenty pounds in three weeks. There was so much discipline emphasized -- regular attendance, taking care and being aware of our bodies, stage presence, etc. The classes helped me a lot especially dance and acting. They made me think instead of just play acting. Sometimes they would emphasize just one exercise for hours and hours, weeks and weeks. . . We learned so much (qtd. in Bangs 70).

Not only were the students learning different styles of acting and the style of deaf theatre, but they were also exposed to directors and actors from all over the world who were interested in this new form. Graduates from the NTD school include Marlee Matlin, Phyllis Frelich, Linda Bove and Audree Norton, all of whom have gone on to win acclaim for their performances on Broadway, television, and in film.

The summer school also allowed the NTD an audition ground for actors who would be part of their permanent touring company. Without the Professional Training School, the NTD would not have been able to get as much funding or as much input from theatre professionals from around the world. The training school allows the NTD to apply for funding, not only as an artistic venture but also as an educational venture. As well, it

makes them the primary ground in the world for training deaf actors and has helped to sustain the quality and commitment of the NTD over the years.

Touring

Much of the international acclaim of the National Theatre of the Deaf is the result of its rigorous touring schedule which has provided the NTD with exposure. The NTD began as a touring company and made an effort to produce quality work that would allow the company to compete with other possible bookings for tours (Brooks 46). The NTD was originally somewhat of a novelty, and deaf and hearing audiences alike attended performances to experience sign language in performance. In the early years, the NTD focused on short works which were easily adapted into sign-mime. They would perform a number of these short works to display the company's variety of styles, and the NTD soon was ready to prepare major works to perform at their own theatre.

Not only has touring bolstered the company's reputation, but the NTD has also been responsible for graduating knowledgeable and talented performers, directors, designers, and other theatre personnel out of its professional school, many of whom have gone on to found deaf theatre companies in other countries. For example, Gordon Hoeppner and Angela Stratiy both attended the NTD summer school and have been involved in forming deaf theatre companies in Canada. Some members of the NTD have participated in exchanges with deaf theatres in other countries, encouraging an exchange of information about the different styles of deaf theatre. For example, in 1973 Bernard Bragg participated in an exchange to the Moscow Theatre of Mimicry and Gesture, the only other professional deaf theatre in the world. Bragg experienced some of the

difficulties in differing cultural perspectives. The actors in the Russian Theatre faced front at all times so that they could follow the lip movements of the narrators who sat in the front row of the auditorium facing the stage. There was no interaction between the actors at all:

> Never had I seen anything more curious. They used skimpy signs, more like gestures, and they never raised their hands in front of their faces, apparently so that their mouthing would remain visible. Their postures were stiff and their gestures rigidly declamatory in a manner that was half-Racine and half-Kabuki (Bragg 126).

Bragg participated in a performance of *Prometheus Bound* at the Russian theatre. Because of his influence in the performance, the Russian style, which was very stilted, became more relaxed so that the actors began interacting with one another, and experiencing the emotion and expression that comes with such sharing.

As a result of the efforts of the National Theatre of the Deaf to pursue cultural exchange, awareness of deaf theatre activity has grown significantly in other countries. Many deaf theatres around the world have been established because of the impact of NTD's tours. Continuing in their tradition of international exchange, the NTD established the Worldwide Deaf Theatre Conference in 1993. At the third annual conference in July 1996, Camille Jeter, the artistic director of NTD, emphasized the importance of the conference:

> The Deaf Theatre Conference affords us a one-of-a-kind interaction and the exchange of ideas among Deaf artists. It has increased our appreciation of Deaf people in Deaf theatre in the United States and around the world. We can explore the *future* for both Deaf children and adults in theatre. Together, in the spirit of hope and determination, we examine the present and look to the future (DTC information guide 2).

Production Considerations

As the NTD developed their performance style, elements of production needed to be taken into consideration so that the performance would be clear and understandable. Considerations in a typical NTD performance, as with hearing theatre productions, include blocking and design, but from a different point of view. For example, levels and set pieces must be designed in such a way as to maximize visual space for the signing performers. Because the signs must be visible from all areas of the audience, special consideration is given to eliminating set pieces which would distract or block the audience's view of the signer. Unlike hearing theatre, where actors can still be heard even with their backs to the audience, in deaf theatre, the signs must be seen in order to be understood. These considerations in set design have prompted the National Theatre of the Deaf to devise unconventional means by which to establish the setting. One of the most stunning innovations of the NTD is their use of the actors to become parts of the set as they are needed. Rather than constructing a replica of a boat, for example, the NTD ensemble becomes the boat. The production combines:

> . . . the art form of sign language with extremely physical performance in which the actors, working as an ensemble, have not only carried the story but also created the physical environment in which it takes place. Settings and props have been kept to a minimum in order to emphasize the tremendous activity of the deaf theatre company (Bangs 141).

The NTD used this approach in many of their performances. For example, in their production of *The Misadventures of Candide*, the only set piece was a large circus tent, and the actors themselves became props, "chairs,

trees, monkeys, whipping posts, a snowstorm and a carwash" (Bangs 100). The cast also extended the limits of their physical bodies at different points in the play: "a group of them dressed in white robes and huddled together to form the rocks over which Candide had to climb. At another, they formed a circle to become a 'bed' surrounding the 'bedmates' who were snoozing inside" (Bangs 100). The imaginative use of the actors' bodies became a staple of NTD performances.

Because of the physical demands of an NTD performance, careful consideration must be given to costuming. Generally, costumes which hinder the movement of the arms, or designs which detract from seeing signs clearly, can make the performance difficult to understand. However, costumes are sometimes purposely made in such a way as to hinder movement in order to establish character. For example, by creating a costume which made the movement of an arm difficult, a speech impediment can be illustrated. While this creates a barrier to clear communication, it may be an intentional choice for character development. The NTD also carefully considers lighting. Obviously, if the signs cannot be seen due to dim lighting, they will not be understood. This does not mean, however, that all productions of the NTD are done in full light. Spotlight, shadow and other lighting techniques have been used to great effect. Some of these techniques may become symbolic in highlighting asides or monologues. Careful placement of actors and lights is important, as any deviation from these considerations could cause confusion on the part of the audience members. While this is a consideration any theatre company needs to make, it is especially important in deaf theatre, due to the heightened need for visual clarity in the

performance. If lighting detracts from the visibility of the hands of the performers, the deaf audience will be unable to understand the signs.

Whose Theatre is it Anyway?

While the NTD is considered successful both critically and commercially, it has been criticized by the deaf community for not showing enough consideration for the culture and language which their name suggests they support. The National Theatre of the Deaf claims to be a national theatre whose performances are accessible to both hearing and deaf audience members. The goals for the theatre as outlined by David Hays in an article in the *American Annals of the Deaf* in 1967 were:

> We must bring better theatre to the deaf community. We must show skillful, bright and handsome deaf people to a hearing world that still reacts with surprise when they see that deaf people can be skillful, bright, and handsome. We must break ground vocationally for deaf people: our goal is not to encourage deaf people to enter a risky profession but to give them the option of entering this attention-getting field. We must give deaf people the pride they deserve as a group when they contribute an outstanding form of art to the world (qtd. in Bangs 61).

Hays outlines the importance of reaching the deaf community, bringing awareness to the hearing community, and providing a place for deaf actors to perform. The mandate of the company was to be accessible to both deaf and hearing audiences, yet some critics of the NTD rebuke them for not living up to this mandate, and accuse them of favouring a hearing audience. In an article in *The Silent News* , which poses the question, "Time for us to ask: Whose Theatre is it Anyway?", Michael A. Schwartz, a deaf writer, criticizes the NTD for favouring a hearing audience. He discusses the inaccessibility of NTD performances to deaf audiences. Schwartz does not dispute the impact which the NTD has had on the United States and other

countries as a cultural institution which has "brought about a national acceptance of American Sign Language... established a guiding beacon for other deaf theatres, and [given] deaf artists jobs" (Shwartz 4). However, Schwartz has a problem with the fact that the NTD has become a theatre for the hearing and not for the deaf. Schwartz cites several elements of the performance which may have the effect of excluding deaf audience members: "costumes that make it difficult to see the hands of the signers"; "fast and furious movements that lose deaf viewers"; "stylized signs"; "rarely is an NTD show written by a deaf artist about an aspect of deaf life or culture"; "rarely does an NTD show experiment with sign language, where the meaning is shared with the deaf audience"; "rarely is an NTD work substantive and profound" (Schwartz 4). All of the concerns that Shwartz outlines in his article culminate in his argument that there is a disconnection between the NTD and the American deaf community. In order to sustain itself as a theatre, the NTD relies largely on the patronage of the hearing theatre-going community, "as well as foundations, corporations, and government agencies, run mostly by hearing people." He complains that the NTD "has had to address itself primarily to hearing audiences" (Bangs 56). As Linda Bove, a former NTD actress, maintains:

> We can only keep NTD alive by attracting hearing audiences and earning box office income. If you look at the hearing majority, only ten percent go to the theatre, generally speaking. That's really small. We depend on that ten percent. . . And it is a good way to expose them to sign language and show them that there are Deaf people living on this earth (qtd. in Bangs 141).

The purpose of the NTD as described by David Hays is to create a "synthesis," in which the spoken word and the visual expression of that word combine to create a stunning performance style. But clearly,

synthesis can only be experienced by the hearing audience members. According to David Hays, eighty to ninety per cent of the audience for a NTD show is hearing (Brooks 47). These people will experience synthesis by means of experiencing both the spoken word and the visual sign. But the remainder of the audience is not allowed access to half of this new form, because they can never achieve the synthesis which depends on both sight and hearing. The deaf audience members can only see the sign, not hear the words. Thus, if synthesis is the goal of any given NTD performance, and the deaf audience cannot reach that goal, then they are excluded from experiencing the "saturation of meaning" provided through the combination of sign language and the spoken word. Yet the question remains: Is one-half of the theatre experience enough? Is it all right for only the hearing audience to experience synthesis? According to Schwartz, it is not. If the theatre is to be a truly national theatre of the deaf, should it not work toward providing theatre that is not only accessible, but also relevant to the deaf cultural experience? The tension which exists because of the overcompensation for the hearing audience's values and appeals has left some members of the deaf community feeling deprived of an art form which had originally been theirs (Boose 13).

The NTD has attempted to make performances completely accessible to a deaf audience. In their fourth season, the NTD presented a show that specifically targeted a deaf audience: *My Third Eye*. The deaf community responded favourably to this performance, which offered a montage which explored the deaf cultural perspective through deaf experiences. This performance met all of the requirements for an accessible deaf theatre production as outlined by Schwartz. It was created by deaf people, experimented with sign language, and was a profound illustration of the

deaf experience. *My Third Eye* included experiments with language which culminated in a "game segment" called "Manifest". "Manifest" encouraged both hearing and deaf audiences to approach sign language in new ways. The game was educational, and the actors taught the audience signs based on similar handshape. For example, the actors would teach the audience signs that all have the "d" handshape. While this part of the performance had no narrative structure, its purpose was to show the characteristics of a sign in order to build awareness of American Sign Language. Through this segment, the focus was placed on the signs themselves, and:

> . . .the actors began thinking about signing not as explanation but as object. In their self-conscious performances, they took their language out of the flow of everyday life and made it into an object for the theater. Going one step further, they not only extracted the sign from the narrative flow but began to analyze its internal structure, and used the analysis to guide the game (Padden and Humphries 76).

The performance also included sketches which played on the strange behaviours of hearing people, such as "our endless conversations on the telephone, our acute fear of being touched, our visual inattentiveness, our frigid faces, where only the jaw moves, faces that deny by their impassivity what our words declare" (Lane 16). The perspective in these segments was uniquely from the deaf point of view. The production did alienate some of the hearing audience members, and

> . . .although My Third Eye was immensely satisfying to Deaf people who wanted to see their culture displayed on the professional stage, it proved disorienting to hearing audiences whose expectations of the art and beauty of sign language theatre had been jarred by their exposure to a deaf cultural perspective (Bangs 94).

Up until their fourth season, all of the NTD's productions had been adaptations of English language scripts, which members of the hearing audience were most likely familiar. The performance of *My Third Eye* was not just a conventional work presented in a beautiful visual language, it was a self-conscious exploration of the language and the culture from whence it came. There is a fundamental difference between simply appreciating the language of the deaf community, and being made aware of the struggle to keep that language a living part of its community. *My Third Eye* challenged attitudes about deafness. For example, part of the deaf cultural perspective explored in *My Third Eye* was one performer's experience of watching a friend being punished at residential school. The scene is of a woman "forced to speak, which she cannot do to the satisfaction of the cruel and omnipotent powers, and unable to escape, the woman is consigned to a terrible death" (Padden & Humphries 37). This scene in particular evoked strong emotional reactions from the audience. The deaf audience members found identification in the scene, while the hearing audience members found it disturbing and unsettling. There is a gap in awareness between the deaf and hearing communities. Many of the hearing audience members probably had no idea of the experiences of residential school, and had difficulty seeing themselves in the role of persecutor.

My Third Eye is one example of original material by deaf artists that has been produced by the NTD. Other such plays have been performed at the NTD, but most of the company's work is adapted from poetry or conventional English language plays. In 1978, in an attempt to satisfy the deaf audience, the NTD added a performing group called Theatre in Sign (TIS) whose mandate was "to bring theater to our own deaf people, to

enrich them" (Bangs 118). The performances done by TIS were in American Sign Language with no voice narration. The absence of voice narration allowed the actors to have more freedom with American Sign Language, rather than having to concentrate on matching their signs to spoken English. This performance style concentrated more on clarity of language than on artistic appeal. The first production was *Gin Game* by D.L. Coburn, which "focused on the psychological events generated by two old people playing cards" (Bangs 156). This performance was lauded by the deaf community who identified with the characters and the situation. The characters in the play used American Sign Language and were engaged in an activity common among deaf people at deaf clubs. Unfortunately, due to administrative changes at the NTD, the TIS was not promoted effectively and was dropped after their first production (Bangs 119).

It is unfortunate that attempts such as the TIS were not successful. The National Theatre of the Deaf has been good at maintaining a hearing audience, but when it comes to making theatre that addressed deaf issues and experiences, the attempts have been fairly short-lived. There is no doubt, however, that the National Theatre of the Deaf has been a major force in furthering deaf awareness in the United States and in other countries around the world.

Chapter Four: Canada and Deaf Theatre

With a number of deaf theatres in the United States, such as the Cleveland SignStage Theatre, The Fairmont Theatre for the Deaf, and the openness and awareness of this new form growing, why have deaf theatres been unsuccessful in Canada? The National Theatre of the Deaf could be said to encompass both the United States and Canada in its scope, but the number of attempts at deaf theatre within Canada cannot be ignored, nor can the fact that none has been successful be overlooked. The fact that Canadians interested in deaf theatre were unwilling merely to bask in the glory of the NTD, but sought instead to establish their own national theatre in 1976, indicated a desire to explore their own cultural heritage through the arts. The Canadian Theatre of the Deaf was established in an attempt to duplicate the model of the National Theatre of the Deaf in approach, style and accessibility to both deaf and hearing audience members. Now that the context for the National Theatre of the Deaf has been established in the prior discussion, along with the context of deaf language and culture and the criteria by which deaf theatre can be evaluated and defined, it is time to place the Canadian Theatre of the Deaf within these contexts. Because the CTD was the first attempt at a national deaf theatre in Canada, and because its experience is similar to many attempts made since it was established, analysis of the company can provide specific reasons for the failure of deaf theatres in Canada. This is not to say that the CTD was completely unsuccessful as a theatre company, but as a national deaf theatre it did not live up to the standards set forth when it was established.

History

The CTD was established by the Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf (CCSD) in 1973 as an attempt to explore deaf culture through the arts. In Canada, before the establishment of the CCSD, "the cultural life of deaf people was extremely impoverished and what [cultural life] there was [remained] isolated and poorly organized" ("CCSD Story"). Historically, local and provincial associations of the deaf often mounted amateur productions as part of social gatherings or special occasions. There is little documentation, however, of theatrical activity in the deaf community in Canada. In his book, *Deaf Heritage in Canada,* Cliff Carbin cites several notable performances which were created by amateur groups. In 1922, a play called *My Son Arthur* was performed by the Winnipeg Association of the Deaf at Columbus Hall in Winnipeg. This performance was attended by a mostly deaf audience and was remounted several times that year (Carbin 343). In 1953, a deaf troupe from Ontario called the "Red Lamp Canadian Troupe" performed in Cincinnati, Ohio, and "marked the first known time Cincinnati theatre patrons (both deaf and hearing) had been offered such a production by deaf performers" (Carbin 343). This play combined sign language and pantomime, and the performance was interpreted into English by a hearing interpreter. The troupe then took the performance back to Canada where it was performed in Toronto at the Evangelical Church of the Deaf (Carbin 343). While these are just two of the documented amateur theatre productions done by the Canadian deaf community,much more was happening at that time in deaf clubs and social organizations. Storytelling is an essential part of deaf culture, and variety nights at deaf clubs provided opportunity for embellished storytelling and play-acting.

Outside of the deaf clubs, schools and organizations presented plays as fundraising activities. For example, David Peikoff, a prominent deaf leader, directed plays to raise money for the Canadian Association of the Deaf. He staged plays in "New York, Buffalo, Detroit, Toronto, London (Ontario) as well as Ottawa and Windsor" (Goldstein 5). Schools for the deaf also presented plays for fundraising purposes. In April 1974, the Manitoba School for the Deaf presented *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* in order to raise funds for two students to attend the Junior National Association of the Deaf Biennial Convention at Gallaudet College ("*Jekyll and Hyde*" 15). These productions were mostly attended by deaf audiences and by parents of the students who were performing. The performances were mounted for specific events to fulfill specific needs. There was no ongoing deaf theatre company which performed on a consistent basis. It was not until the establishment of the Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf that thought went into the idea of establishing a professional deaf theatre company which would represent Canada as a national organization.

The Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf

Forrest Nickerson, a deaf man, was eager to establish an institution for the deaf which would encourage "the sharing of knowledge, the furtherance of skills, the nurturing of the cultural spirit, and the pursuit of excellence" (Carbin 226). The deaf organizations that did exist focused on their political and social responsibility to "maintain. . . sign language in the residential schools, to provide better vocational training for deaf youth, and to open the doors of employment to deaf people, especially in the areas of education, business, and government" (Carbin 179). Nickerson, along with a few other like-minded individuals, met together in the early 1970s

to discuss the possibility of a national cultural organization solely committed to identify and encourage a wide range of talent within the deaf community in order to build awareness of the culture. They were also interested in providing a place for cultural enrichment and education in the arts. The result of their meeting was the establishment in 1973 of the Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf as a federally chartered non-profit organization. The CCSD became an organization which developed events where deaf people could come together artistically and explore their community and their language. At the time of its incorporation, the CCSD's objectives were to:

> . . . promote the development of cultural programs so that they may achieve a state of well being - a state in which they will function most effectively while at home, work and play. To challenge the deaf, recognize and honour their outstanding achievements (Nickerson, "CCSD" 5).

The Society began to discuss ways in which these objectives could be met. They presented several ideas such as a Canadian Talent Registry which would keep updated information about deaf artists on file for various jobs in the entertainment industry. They also proposed a Hall of Fame, a Deaf Literary Journal, and a Museum and Theatre which would be housed in a central cultural building in Winnipeg, modeled after the Russian House of Culture, a central cultural building for the deaf in Moscow. In the June 1973 issue of *Cultural Horizons of the Deaf in Canada*, the Russian House of Culture was praised for its facilities:

> . . . with 107,640 square feet of floor space, it includes two lecture halls, a library and a reading room, a studio for amateur painters and sculptors and a chess and checker club. A highlight of the House of Culture is a 700 seat, fully equipped theatre of Mimicry and Gesture ("Canada Does not Offer" 12).

The CCSD wanted to provide the deaf community in Canada with a central cultural location like this one which would draw the deaf community together. The cultural centre would be a place where the deaf cultural experience would be portrayed in art, theatre and education. The world would be able to see what deaf people can accomplish, and awareness and understanding of the deaf community would grow.

The proposal that generated the most interest, and eventually the most success, was to create a national cultural competition which would bring together deaf people from all over Canada to showcase their talents. A forum for the talents of deaf people could best be achieved through the establishment of a "cultural contest" which would award talented people in five main areas:

> physical (painting, drawing, prints, sculpture, colour transparencies and photography), literary (poetry, creative writing, religious theme writing, and historical writing), performance (pantomime, one act plays, Miss Deaf Canada Pageant), recreational (bridge, chess, dance, magic, and humour), and home arts (Knitting, crocheting, quilting, embroidery, sewing, and hooked rugs) (Petrone 4).

Contestants in each of the categories would participate in local cultural competitions sponsored by local and provincial organizations in order to proceed to the national contest sponsored by the CCSD and held in cities around Canada. The final competition would take place at the biennial festival of the arts sponsored by the CCSD. In 1973, the awards night became a reality and was called the "Golden Defty Awards." The name "Defty" was coined by the CCSD for the first cultural competition, and stands for "deaf" and "deft" to include a sense of both the uniqueness and the skill of the contestants. These awards nights gave deaf performers the opportunity to showcase their talents in a nationwide competition, and to

see the talent of other deaf artists from all over Canada. Some of the favourite areas of competition were home arts, song, Miss Deaf Canada, and performance. The first cultural competition took place in Calgary at the Allied Arts Centre, July 16-20, 1973. Other competitions have taken place in Bellville, Ontario, and Vancouver. The winners in each category of competition were announced on local radio stations, allowing the hearing community to become aware of the talents of the deaf community. These cultural competitions still take place every other year and are now called the National Festival of the Arts (NFA).

The CCSD also began publication of a magazine entitled *Cultural Horizons of the Deaf in Canada,* which was sent to subscribers across Canada. This magazine featured a list of the winners in each category of the competition, along with feature articles on selected winners. The Fall/Winter 1974 and January 1974 issues of *Cultural Horizons* featured cover stories on the winners of the Miss Deaf Canada Pageant. The magazine also covered other cultural news in the deaf community across Canada, and increasingly provided a way to bridge the distance between members of the deaf community in different provinces. The magazine also became a way to document cultural activity and to encourage "renewed co-operation among deaf professionals, amateurs, and members of the communities" (Nickerson, "CCSD" 3). This magazine was one of the primary means of information exchange among deaf people across Canada, letting them know about upcoming events and the progress of various people and organizations.

The Canadian Theatre of the Deaf (CTD)

Since the time of its establishment, the CCSD had wanted a national deaf theatre company. As the society was developing through its first years,they were eager to showcase all of the arts in their cultural competitions, but did not highlight any one of these, such as theatre. When the CCSD did decide to go ahead with a theatre, it was just one aspect of the many branches of interest of the CCSD. While the NTD seemed to be formed by the right people at the right time, the CTD came about in a much more roundabout way. The CTD started as one of many ideas put forth by the CCSD in their effort to bring about awareness of deaf culture. Most cultural events for the deaf in Canada prior to 1973 were sponsored by the local provincial associations of the deaf, and were given primarily for fundraising purposes. The CCSD sought to be a cultural centre for the deaf where deaf artists could have a central location to showcase their talents in an ongoing way. Some of the members of the CCSD had seen the NTD perform, were excited by what they saw, and were eager to create a theatre as successful as the NTD. The CCSD was just beginning to find its footing in the cultural competitions and the development of their magazine, and most of their time, money and energy were going to making those two things work. Forrest Nickerson, CCSD founder, was aware that in order for Canada to enjoy a success like that of the NTD, the country would need to catch up culturally. In the Spring/Summer 1974 edition of *Cultural Horizons*, Nickerson bemoans the slow rate at which cultural activity for deaf people in Canada emerges and develops.

> In Canada, we, in the silent world are definitely left far behind in the high-spirited cultural activities and performing arts of the hearing

> world. Also, we are between eight and ten years behind the best advantages of the deaf in the United States and Russia. The NTD started nine years ago. In the United States, there are so many excellent cultural activities, including performing arts among the deaf, provided to them by strong financial support from state and federal governments and foundations ("Culturally Speaking" 3).

By 1973, Russia's deaf community already had a House of Culture established, and the United States had a national theatre. Much of this was due to the fact that residential schools for the deaf were quickly disappearing, while in the United States, Gallaudet was making itself known not only as an educational institution but also as a cultural hub for the surrounding deaf community. Gallaudet is located in Washington, D.C., so enjoyed not only cultural support, but political support from the government as well, partly because of its proximity to the corridors of political power.

The idea for the Canadian Theatre of the Deaf, and the realization of the company, were not simultaneous. Finding leadership for the company was difficult. Unlike the NTD, which began with three very talented and committed individuals who had a vision for a new type of theatre, the CTD began as an idea of something that would be good for the CCSD in terms of expanding their cultural presence. The first major weakness of the CTD was apparent even before the company was established. There was no vision other than to model an organization on the National Theatre of the Deaf, and the CCSD had neither the resources nor the committed individuals to get the theatre going. There was no training ground for deaf artists like the National Theatre of the Deaf's professional school, from which to pick talented and qualified deaf theatre directors and performers. According to Angela Petrone Stratiy, a deaf woman who was the vice-president and cultural director of the CCSD, the

seed for a theatre had been planted in 1973, after the first cultural competition in Calgary. "This is when deaf people started to realize that there are deaf actors and we started to encourage people to set things up" (Petrone Stratiy). The CCSD announced the establishment of the CTD even before there was someone in place to give the theatre direction. With the announcement came interest from provincial associations, some of whom had seen the NTD perform and were excited about the possibility of a national deaf theatre in Canada.

As we have seen, the National Theatre of the Deaf in the United States was established with theatre connections already present and established. David Hays was a respected Broadway designer, well versed in theatrical production; Anne Bancroft was a respected actress; and Bernard Bragg was a talented deaf performer who had been forging ground with innovative performance styles utilizing American Sign Language and Mime. The Canadian Theatre of the Deaf, on the other hand, came out of an organization whose primary focus was cultural competitions, and whose ties to the theatre community were very limited. There was no professional training school for deaf students in Canada, nor was there a central school like Gallaudet where theatre was part of the curriculum. The dramatic resources for the CCSD were very small and they did not have the financial means to bring in theatre practitioners from the United States to start something up.

The CTD needed vision for this enterprise, and the first person they turned to was Carl Simonson, a hearing man who was in charge of interpreter services at Red Deer College. While continuing in his full-time job, he accepted an appointment to the job of General Manager of the Canadian Theatre of the Deaf. Simonson strongly desired to achieve the

kind of success that the NTD enjoyed, but was uncertain how that was to be done. In the June 1973 issue of *Cultural Horizons*, he asserted: "I firmly believe that we have the talent and the necessary dedication to make the Canadian Theatre of the Deaf a new and exciting theatrical medium in Canada" ("CTD" 10). He emphasized the need for cultural exchange, the establishment of workshops, and the encouragement of theatrical development across Canada.

At the time of this appointment, his responsibilities were outlined in a letter from the CCSD:

> (a) To appoint culturally-minded persons to assist you in planning, developing and promoting the phases of programs for the CTD.
> (b) To appoint persons to conduct theater workshops at schools for the deaf, college campuses and community theatres in Canada.
> (c) To study the possibilities of inter-departmental work, e.g., combining the art, drama, dance and rhythm departments for special programs, exchanges with the National Theatre of the Deaf, Manitoba Theatre Centre, Winnipeg Symphony, Royal Winnipeg Ballet and other organizations in Canada and suggestions for ways for involving the deaf and hearing impaired for the Canadian Theatre of the Deaf (Nickerson 1 March 1973).

These were major requirements for a man who, on top of his responsibilities as the General Manager of the CTD, still worked a full-time job. While Simonson had a great interest in deaf theatre, he had very little practical training or time to see to fruition a project as burdensome as the CTD. As well, some members of the deaf community felt that a hearing man was not the best person to be the first manager of the CTD, for although he knew American Sign Language, they felt that he did not have the ties to the deaf community that a deaf General Manager might. This situation is similar to the "Deaf President Now" movement at Gallaudet. It is not the fact simply that Simonson and Dr. Zinser are

hearing that made their appointments inappropriate, but also their lack of experience for each specific post. While Simonson worked with the deaf, as did Zinser, neither could empathize with nor understand the deaf community's history and needs, except indirectly. Nor did Simonson have the theatrical experience. He knew what the National Theatre of the Deaf looked like, but as for practical ways of establishing that sort of theatre company in Winnipeg, he did not have the time or the means to explore the possibilities. One year after his appointment as Managing Director of the CTD, Simonson wrote in the January 1974 issue of *Cultural Horizons*, "we in Canada have a long way to go in planning the CTD and I am sure we will need a great deal of guidance from the NTD in the US" ("CTD" 33).

By early 1974, the CTD had been in existence for a year, yet there was no company of personnel, and no performances had been done. Simonson was aware of the direction that the CTD needed to go, and he knew that he was ultimately not the person to provide leadership. He resigned his position in January 1974, and recognized the limits of his commitment: "I am finding my present position as Coordinator for the Support Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing very demanding, and therefore I am unable to devote the time needed to help the Theatre grow in Canada" ("I'm Leaving" 8).

After Simonson's resignation, the position was handed over in the interim to Angela Petrone, who had some experience in theatre. In particular, Petrone had attended the NTD summer school in 1969 and had directed plays at the Manitoba School for the Deaf, where she taught Social Studies. During the time of Petrone's management, the CTD participated in local performances at schools and senior citizens' homes, and the style of the performances was usually pantomime because it was more easily

understood. This again was a step away from the original purpose of the CTD. There did not seem to be a commitment to explore new forms of theatre. Petrone's tenure at the CTD lasted only about a year, as she too was struggling with time and priorities. She was continuing her duties at the Manitoba School for the Deaf and at the CCSD, as well as managing the CTD. The CCSD apparently did not anticipate, nor was it aware of, the time commitment needed for the position of General Manager. It is not surprising that the theatre did not grow in these years, for it clearly needed a full-time director, willing to commit fully to the success of the theatre.

During the time Simonson and Petrone were General Managers of the CTD, the CCSD was going through financial difficulties. Simonson had already pointed to the future as including guidance from the NTD in the United States, whereas Nickerson, who wanted the theatre to go ahead, was suggesting that perhaps it was an impossibility in Canada. In the Spring/Summer 1974 issue of *Cultural Horizons,* Nickerson outlines two

> . . .grave cultural setbacks among the deaf and hearing impaired. **First** is the rejection of financial support of the CCSD by the Federal Government and the Canada Council and **second**. . . the [Manitoba] Provincial Government's lack of adequate support for existing cultural systems among the deaf and hearing impaired in the name of CCSD, Inc ("Director Speaks Out" 22).

Like most non-profit organizations, the CCSD depended on project-to-project funding. Applications for grants were often denied, and those that were given were not enough to sustain major cultural projects such as the theatre. Most of the monies went toward the continuation of the cultural contests and the magazine. It was not until the CTD went out on its own for funding that it was successful in securing grants. Most of the grants the CCSD received were specific to a province, and not to an event. Because

the CTD was under the wing of the CCSD, and all funding and advertising was the responsibility of the CCSD, therefore when the society was in financial crisis, so was the theatre. For a period of time, all special cultural projects under the CCSD, including the CTD, were suspended due to lack of financial support from the government. It seemed that the special projects side of the CCSD never got off the ground, while the established contests continued unhindered. There was a general commitment to the cultural competitions not only from the CCSD as an organization, but also from the local provincial organizations who knew what to expect and what their responsibilities were. In regard to the theatre, there were no guidelines laid out, no call for support from the provincial organizations, and no well-thought-out approach as to how to gain the sort of support that the NTD enjoyed in the United States. The CCSD continued to function without their special projects, and focussed on planning for the Second National Cultural Tournament held in conjunction with the Ontario Association of the Deaf which was to take place in Bellville, Ontario in July 1974.

In 1974, the CCSD tried once again to make Canadians aware of the cultural riches in other countries, which included theatres of the deaf, and to elicit donations for a national theatre. The CCSD sought information about deaf theatres around the world. The Spring/Summer 1974 issue of *Cultural Horizons* was dedicated to documenting deaf theatre activity around the world in an attempt to show what the CTD could become, given the right vision and funding. The magazine highlighted troupes such as the Israeli Demama Mime and Dance Group, the Pantomime Theatre of Olsztyn in Poland, the Tyst Theatre in Switzerland and the German Theatre of the Deaf (24). Each theatre was listed with its supporting agency, to

show by comparison how impoverished deaf theatre was in Canada. For example:

> In Moscow, the all-Russian Society of the Deaf House of Culture is continuously supported heartedly and understandably by the Russian Government. In the U.S., up to date, much of the progress of performing arts for the deaf, such as the NTD and its performing arts has been possible by grants openly from the U.S. government. Canada does not offer its deaf any facility even remotely comparable to those found in other countries ("Director Speaks Out" 23).

In an article entitled "Tomorrow Begins Today" in the same issue, funding sources are outlined for some of the deaf theatre companies around the world. The Swedish Tyst Theatre received $25,000 grants annually from the Swedish government, The Israeli Demama Mime and Dance Group was supported by "the [Israeli] Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the America-Israel Culture Fund" (8). Eliciting funding from government sources proved difficult in Canada. The CCSD did, however, receive small grants for special projects in particular provinces. For example, in 1974, the CCSD received a grant for $1500 from the province of Ontario "to assist in our summer arts competition," and a $9,000 grant from the Quebec government "for the purpose of cultural improvement of the deaf in Quebec"("Cultural News," 1974: 24). While these grants alleviated some of the financial burdens of the CCSD, they did not provide enough money to keep any significant cultural projects.

In 1975, projects that the society had suspended were now presented again with renewed vigor, and the CCSD reclaimed their proposal for a cultural centre that would rival the Russia House of Culture. Partly, the renewed interest stemmed from the $1,500 grant from the Ontario Arts Council, and the development of a building fund campaign which would

target business people and corporate officers. The primary focus of the building fund campaign was to establish a cultural centre for the deaf community where all of the arts would be accessible under one roof. The CCSD returned to their original idea, and drew up plans for a centre which would include a museum, theatre, display area and Hall of Fame. The CCSD was rigorous in its determination to place itself among the other countries who were given support to establish such centers for their deaf communities. In the Spring/Summer 1975 issue of *Cultural Horizons* magazine is a full-page advertisement for the cultural center which makes the accusation that "Canada does not offer its deaf any facility even remotely comparable to those found in other countries" (10). The CCSD was asking for three million dollars from business people and subscribers to *Cultural Horizons* to set up the cultural centre, and were dependent on money from private donations and businesses. Not enough donations came in for this project and, unfortunately, by Fall 1975, the building campaign had been abandoned "because of lack of special funding and unfavorable climate of deaf awareness." ("Culturally Aware" 1975/76: 3). Although specific plans were drawn up for the House of Culture, complete with diagrams of the finished project, the CCSD did not pursue major funding sources, but rather targeted businesses for their support. The CCSD needed a significant amount of money to get the house of culture going, and it was questionable as to whether Winnipeg could support such an endeavor. Would there be enough deaf people to support the enterprise once it was established? The CCSD had no one person on their side who could provide the leverage needed to pull in a major grant. The practical nature of how the House of Culture was to come about was totally left out of the plans. It was a visionary idea, but backed with little else.

The idea for a theatre was not totally abandoned, and in 1976, at the eighteenth Triennial Convention of the Western Canada Association of the Deaf in Vancouver, Forrest Nickerson and Angela Petrone were introduced to a group of deaf performers who called themselves the BC Deaf Mime Troupe. Both Petrone and Nickerson were impressed with their director Mike Hanrahan, a young deaf man from England, who had extensive training in mime and deaf theatre. Hanrahan was born deaf, and in 1965 had joined the National Theatre of the Deaf in London, where he trained for four years. He also participated in private workshops at the National Theatre of the Deaf in London with Lindsay Kemp, Lord Laurence Olivier, the Mummenshanz theatre, Pat Keysell and Marcel Marceau ("Media Release 1976"). In the fall of 1976, the BC Deaf Mime Troupe was eager to begin a tour and were asking for full support from the CCSD for their project. In a letter to the CCSD, Mike Hanrahan outlined the objectives of the BC Deaf Mime Troupe, stressing their desire to:

> . . .preserve, guide, stimulate, encourage, motivate, and advance its membership toward a standard of excellence and a greater level of cultural achievement through the new dimension of communication through the art of mime, while at the same time educating school children and the general pubic regarding the possibilities of such communication and the broadening of their understanding of the culture of the deaf (Hanrahan, 28 July 1976).

The CCSD proposed a merger between the BC Deaf Mime Troupe and the CTD. Because the BC Deaf Mime Troupe already had all materials in place for a fall tour, and the CTD was not operational, the transfer of name was all that needed to happen. In August 1976, only a few weeks after Hanrahan had approached the CCSD for support, the BC Deaf Mime

Troupe became the Canadian Theatre of the Deaf. In their eagerness to establish a theatre company for Canada, the CCSD sacrificed their original objective, which was to rival the success and style of the NTD, and settled for a transfer of name to a mime company. The significance of this step in the eventual dissolution of the company is paramount. The NTD had been innovative and new in style, whereas the new CTD was an existing mime troupe which, while certainly committed to furthering cultural awareness, had objectives which were fundamentally different from those of the original CTD.

Finally, the CCSD had secured for their theatre a manager who was committed to working full-time to establish a national theatre of the deaf in Canada. Because some of the members of the BC Mime Troupe were maintained as members of the CTD, the transfer was smooth from one troupe to the other. At this time, the members of the company were all deaf: Mike Hanrahan as Managing Director; Angela Petrone as General Manager; Marsha Simon, Maryanne Chmiel and Robert Barr, performers; and Gordon Hoeppner, Lighting and Design. Thus the troupe became the Canadian Theatre of the Deaf.

To a certain extent, the timing was right for the CCSD to establish the CTD through the BC Deaf Mime Troupe. Up until the time that Petrone and Nickerson met Hanrahan, there had been no one person committed to establishing the theatre. In their eagerness to establish the theatre through Hanrahan and his troupe, the CCSD missed a number of vital steps which might have done more to secure the future of the CTD. They did not consider the impact that assuming a theatre company already established in Vancouver would have on the CCSD in Winnipeg, nor did they consider discussing the merger with the local provincial associations

which would be responsible for many of the bookings of the company and for the financial support of the CTD, nor did they consider the significant disparity between their original objectives for the CTD and the objectives for the BC Deaf Mime Troupe.

Training

It has already been established that there existed no school in Canada comprable to the National Theatre of the Deaf's Professional Training School. While Mike Hanrahan had training at the National Theatre of the Deaf in London, England, and with Marcel Marceau, other members of the troupe had only been involved in amateur theatre productions. While they did branch out in their later years to receive training from instructors such as Linda Rubin, and they did collaborate with writers and directors, they did not engage in any training specifically in the style of deaf theatre. As we have seen, the NTD had been able to establish itself as a theatre largely due to the rigorous training school and the wealth of knowledge gleaned from guest directors, actors, and designers. The CTD, on the other hand, stayed within the confines of mime, and while they were very talented at it and even explored new possibilities with mime, they did not have the opportunity to enjoy the richness that would have come from being involved in a training school.

Touring

Because the CCSD made the decision to activate the CTD within such a short time after the national convention, various provincial groups were hurt by being left out of the decision-making process, and the suddenness with which the newly-formed CTD appeared was disconcerting to some provincial directors. The Alberta provincial cultural director, E.L. Palate, felt that there should have been some consultation with all cultural

directors if the troupe was to represent all of Canada. Palate wrote to the CCSD:

> Surely such a big decision should have been discussed at the national convention, especially as it had just convened two weeks before. Since we were not consulted, we wonder if the other Cultural Societies in Ontario, in Quebec, and in the Maritimes were consulted. Surely a national decision should not be made on the basis of a quick conference between groups from only two provinces! (Palate, 12 August 1976).

The national convention was a place where members of the deaf community from across Canada gathered to discuss and plan for cultural events. It was one of the unifying events for the deaf community in Canada. To establish a national theatre, especially one that was to be dependent on provincial cultural associations for bookings, without the association's prior knowledge was a serious misstep on the part of the CCSD. They were to be sending their newly-formed theatre out for a tour in August, and none of the provincial associations knew what the theatre looked like or what performance style they would be seeing. Had the provincial associations been included in the forming of the company, they might have been more prepared to host performances and to better support the group.

Because the tour was happening so quickly, not only were the provincial associations unaware of the purpose of the CTD, but they did not have enough time to make the arrangements necessary to accommodate the CTD. From the beginning, provincial associations were wary of the future of the company. The Alberta Association of the Deaf suggested that:

> . . . the CTD is on the verge of becoming a professional company; let it also be professional in its management, too. Learn the procedures

> that are used to expedite tours. To maintain good public relations consultation is important; so is timing (Palate, 12 August 1976).

From the beginning of their first tour, the CTD was already on tenuous footing with the local provincial associations, and that jeopardized the need for the CTD to build a firm performance foundation. To complicate the situation, up to this point the CTD had existed in Winnipeg, and had only done local performances. With the transfer of the CTD to the BC Deaf Mime Troupe, operations for the theatre were suddenly shifted to Vancouver. This posed a few problems. Angela Petrone in Winnipeg remained general manager of the CTD, while Mike Hanrahan in Vancouver became managing director. All performances for the first tour were booked through the Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf in Winnipeg, then the information was sent by mail to the theatre in Vancouver. Although many bookings were made, some were jeopardized by lack of communication. There was lag time, because the theatre did not have a TTY (a device used with the phone to enable deaf people to type messages to one another via the phone line), and therefore all correspondence was written and sent by mail. Much time was spent in transit between communications. In essence, the physical distance between the CCSD and the CTD compounded an already chaotic situation, and this hurt the CTD on their first tour. Not only did the CTD have to send out media releases and information packages for bookings, but they had to make those available to the CCSD in Winnipeg for sending out.

The new CTD was formed in August 1976, with their first booking scheduled for October, which did not leave much time to ferry information from Vancouver to Winnipeg. The media release, sent to provincial associations, included application forms for the provincial cultural

directors to distribute to schools, clubs, and any place which might be interested in having the CTD perform. Many places received these packages with only a week or two to publicize the performance, and because of this, only members of the local provincial association who could be contacted easily were able to attend. For example, the Edmonton Society of the Deaf did not have enough time to advertise and book a hall for a performance, so it cancelled the Edmonton portion of the tour. The Ontario chapter also cancelled because of lack of time to publicize. There was little time to publicize for the CTD's performance in Montreal: "unfortunately, their performance was not publicized at all for the Montreal and McGill Community. The audience consisted, with the possible exception of this reviewer, of the deaf from the Montreal community who had been notified of this performance through their own cultural association" (Zsolt qtd. in *Cultural Horizons*. Spring/Summer 1977: 15).

After the learning experience of the first tour, the CTD began to plan for a Spring 1977 tour. The company began applying for grants and soliciting donations on their own. Hanrahan was feeling pressure, bearing the weight of directing, performing, creating and administration. Even though Petrone was responsible for many of the administrative duties, constantly relaying information from Winnipeg to Vancouver took time and energy. Hanrahan pushed for the CTD to hire its own General Manager and public relations consultant to be based in Vancouver to assist Hanrahan with his duties so that he could concentrate on the performance aspect of the company (Hanrahan, 8 Sept 1976).

By September of 1976, the CTD was beginning to take more responsibility for bookings as Judy Weiser, taking over for Angela

Petrone, joined the company as the new general manager. At this point, the CTD became more centralized. Rather than doing their bookings through the CCSD in Winnipeg, they now took care of it in Vancouver. With the appointment of Judy Weiser, Hanrahan was freed to concentrate more fully on the artistic quality of production and less on administration. This centralization, though in the CTD's best interest, signified another step away from the original intent of the theatre to model the NTD. The BC Deaf Mime Troupe was not evolving into the original intention of the CTD. Instead, the philosophy and cultural goals of the BC Deaf Mime Troupe had replaced those of the original CTD.

In the time leading up to the second tour of the new CTD, two performers from a mime theatre in Quebec joined the CTD to develop new projects. The troupe then spent the beginning of 1977 establishing themselves in the Vancouver community, performing in schools and local halls. Because of the problems with local cultural organizations on the CTD's first tour, the company went through a period of transition. They not only moved away from the CCSD, they also dealt with personal problems within the company. During and subsequent to their first tour, questions arose in connection with misuse of funds, unauthorized long distance calls, and accusations of theft, relating to their performance in Regina. Most of these questions came about because of a long-standing miscommunication among Mike Hanrahan, the CTD, CCSD and the Regina Association of the Deaf. The CTD had performed at Darke Hall in Regina on October 22 and 23, 1976. After the performance, there were complaints from the local cultural director about the troupe members peddling for money on the streets, stealing clothing from the Hall, and leaving a large mess after the performance. Charges were never laid in

connection with these accusations but members of the troupe felt so strongly about the situation that they wanted to "have no future business dealings with Mike Hanrahan, nor any with CTD while he is still director" ("Meeting Minutes"). This period in CTD's history was referred to in the Spring/Summer 1977 issue of *Cultural Horizons* magazine as a time when "Dark clouds are beginning to hover over the CTD, casting dark shadows on future prospects" ("Culturally Aware" 11). Ultimately, the Spring 1977 tour did not happen, and Mike Hanrahan left the CTD for a few months to study with Serge Briere in Quebec at the Theatre Visuel des Sourds. Hanrahan felt that, because it was uncertain if the CTD would continue, he would go where he could be challenged in pursuing the kind of theatre in which he wanted to participate (Hanrahan, 27 March 1977).

While Hanrahan was in Quebec, the CTD held a meeting to "share discussion about feelings of confusion regarding Mike Hanrahan, present director of the Canadian Theatre of the Deaf" ("Meeting Minutes"). The meeting brought up issues concerning Hanrahan's misrepresentation of his financial situation, theft accusations, and the Canada Works Grant which was to be awarded to the troupe in October 1977 ("Meeting Minutes"). Members of the troupe were afraid that should the CTD be awarded the grant, it might be misused. As a result of this meeting, most of the troupe resigned. When Hanrahan returned from Quebec, he formed a new company with the money from the $78,000 Canada Works Grant. The company hired a new Project Manager, and now had enough money to cover salaries from November 1977 to June 1978. It is not made clear whether Hanrahan was ever confronted about the accusations from the troupe members. It is clear that charges were not laid against Hanrahan

and that he maintained his position as Artistic Director of the CTD for the next season.

Throughout the first half of 1978, the CTD began to establish a name for itself in schools in the Vancouver area. The company also toured to art festivals on the West Coast. All of these endeavors were made possible by the Canada Works Grant. During that time, the company was involved in many projects, including a documentary film, as well as producing their own newsletter. They created the newsletter out of a desire to inform others around Canada about their progress, upcoming performances, and basic information about the company. In February 1978 the CTD hired Mike Hanrahan's wife, Patricia Hanrahan, as a cultural director. Patricia had formerly been a performer in the BC Deaf Mime Troupe. Her job was to act as a liaison between the company and the British Columbia Society of the Deaf. This is rather ironic, as the CTD then had more direct communication with the local provincial organization than with their parent organization, the CCSD. It is telling how far from the original objective of the CTD the troupe had strayed. The focus of the CTD at this time was to establish itself as a vital part of the Vancouver theatre community. The more deeply rooted the CTD became in Vancouver, the further away it moved from the CCSD's idea of the theatre as a central national theatre. This again reinforced the problem of having given the name "Canadian Theatre of the Deaf" to the BC Deaf Mime Troupe.

In March 1978, the CTD brought in guest director and playwright Howie Cooper to help develop new works ("Project Report," 22 March 1978). In April, the company applied for grants to keep them going through the next year. They received a $1,500 grant from the City of Vancouver to cover operating costs for the 1978/79 year (*CTD Newsletter*

March 1978). The CTD began work for the next season, and to cope with bookings, they hired three new staff members to concentrate fully on the task. By June 1978, almost all of the following October had been booked in schools around the area.

The CTD decided to use the remaining money from the Canadian Works grant to allow the performers some time off before the Fall tour. When the company came back together, they performed through the season in local schools and provided workshops. Then, just as suddenly as the CTD appeared, it dissolved. Shortly after its tour in 1978-79, the CTD closed because the grant money had been used up on the tour and personal issues brought up at the meeting in late 1977 were not resolved.

Attempts were made to contact Hanrahan, who is now living in the United States, but I was unable to reach him for comment on his perspectives regarding the dissolution of the CTD. While it is clear that there were significant personal conflicts within the group, there still remains a loyalty to the company and to the people involved and a hesitancy to discuss past issues. As Gordon Hoeppner maintains, while there were significant personal and professional issues, "you can't talk bad about a group that just had a bad moment" (Hoeppner).

Performance Style

Perhaps the demise of the CTD was inevitable from the start. Certainly, the original objectives of the CTD, and the aims and goals and the performance style of the BC Deaf Mime Troupe, were not compatible. The performance style of the new Canadian Theatre of the Deaf, still essentially the BC Deaf Mime Troupe,was mime. Although their

performances were done in mime, the first media release given by the company had suggested a style closer to that of the NTD:

> . . .the art of mime through the medium of sign-mime, regular mime, and gesture, as well as a variety of accompaniment to poetry, music and dance. This rich dimension of silent communication will begin to intrigue and involve those watching (and performing) and lead toward individual and societal innovation and growth. Sign mime is not intended to be a substitute for verbal language, and it is hoped that it will not be judged as such. The CTD offers it as a theatrical art form along with a variety of others, an extension of mime into language, a visual interpretation of the spirit and thought behind the words ("Media Release 1976").

This media release complicated the tenuous presence of the CTD, because groups who booked the company for tours expected a style closer to that of the NTD, and what they saw was mime. When the CTD was originally introduced in 1973, with Carl Simonson as director, the primary aim of the theatre was to "coordinate and plan programs that will encourage theatrical development of the deaf in centres across Canada" through the use of 'a new and exciting theatrical medium' modeled after the NTD in the States" (Simonson, 1973: 10). However, the aim of the BC Deaf Mime Troupe was to "preserve, guide, stimulate, encourage, motivate, and advance its membership toward a standard of excellence and a greater level of cultural achievement through the new dimension of communication through the art of mime" (Hanrahan, 28 July 1976). These two objectives are in direct opposition to one another and fundamentally affected the future of the CTD. For even in the years that the CTD was not fully operational, the articles in *Cultural Horizons* and all of the references to the CTD were in direct relation to the National Theatre of the Deaf and its unique style of deaf theatre. So when the CTD was fully established and began to tour, what was expected and what was seen were two different things. These

differences fundamentally influenced the direction of the CTD. Focus on mime only moved the CTD further away from a distinctive cultural presence modelled after the NTD. In the 1970s there was already a professional mime company, the Canadian Mime Theatre, which was very successful. The Canadian Mime Theatre was established in 1969 and had a school to teach mime to interested Canadians. The theatre was sponsored by organizations such as the Manitoba Theatre Centre and the Holiday Playhouse in Vancouver (Benson, 2 January 1974). The only differences between the Canadian Mime Theatre and the CTD was that the latter was made up of deaf performers.

On their first tour, the CTD's performances included selections from the troupe's repertoire of twenty-eight short sketches, ranging from elaborately costumed period pieces to simple pieces with minimal costuming. The troupe also provided a two-hour workshop that was designed to enlighten and give hands-on experience to those interested in the style of the Canadian Theatre of the Deaf. At a performance at Kennebecasis Valley High School in Rothesay, New Brunswick, the CTD was praised for their ability to perform "without the use of or any apparent need of props, [and] the painted foursome flit almost acrobatically across the stage in roles made realistic to the audience through their professional use of body movement and realistic and symbolic gestures" (Davis qtd. in *Cultural Horizons*. Spring/Summer 1977: 13). However, their performance in Vancouver in December 1976 was not as well received. The critic, Bob Allen of the *Vancouver Province*, picked up on the irony of the changeover of name: "If one was to be strictly accurate, the Canadian Theatre of the Deaf should be called the Canadian Mime Theatre of the Deaf because classical mime is this group's total orientation" (Allen,

19 Dec. 1976). However, Allen did see potential in the group to develop a more distinctive performance style. Another review of the same performance was given by Max Wyman of the *Vancouver Sun* , and reiterates Allen's comment about the lack of distinctiveness: "Hanrahan needs to bring a lot more originality of thought and imagination to the company's program if it is to evolve for itself a distinctive character" (Wyman, 18 Dec. 1976). Wyman described the performance as lacking originality and as being very similar in style to the work of Marcel Marceau.

The style of the CTD at this stage in their development had not yet become distinct. Unlike the NTD, the CTD was not engaged in experiments with American Sign Language. The CTD was concerned with the extension of "mime into language," not the extension of language into mime. The perspectives were ultimately different. American Sign Language was the foundation for NTD performances, and they had extended that language to a more universal mimic representation. The CTD, on the other hand, began with mime and manipulated it into what they called a visual language, but which had no basis in language at all. Even Hanrahan described the performance as pure mime: "Traditional (theatre) mime uses white make-up to give a more exaggerated idea of expression. White reflects the lights better. What we do (deaf mime) is more original. . . the beginnings of mime" (Hart 3). The performers of the CTD were talented in mime, to be sure, but there was no exploration of ASL.

In 1978, the performance style of the company started to evolve, as they had new staff members and a new year to plan. The troupe actively sought out ways to make their performances more distinct. In order to

learn new aspects of movement, the troupe enrolled in dance classes. In early 1978, Linda Rubin, an instructor at Synergy Dance in Vancouver, taught movement to members of the Canadian Theatre of the Deaf. The members of the company were enrolled in weekly classes which took place at her Vancouver studio:

> We have begun work with a special dance instructor who will be helping the group to produce two ten-minute segments of interpretive dance mime. This is a unique opportunity for the troupe, both in terms of the addition to their repertoire and of the experience of learning new techniques for self-expression through body language ("Project Report," 5 January 1978).

The CTD was beginning to accomplish the objectives set out in its media release of 1976 to take mime truly to a new level of communication and expression. They did not want to be simply an imitation of hearing theatre, but were committed to offering something that would offer insight into the deaf perspective ("Moments Unmasked"). The dance lessons were a significant part of a forward-looking performance base: "the goal was to not use what they already knew, which was mime. Their goal was to allow that mode of expression to be put on the back burner and to use a more 'dancerly' or more movement-based language" (Rubin).

The new emphasis in their performance style paid off for the troupe, and Bob Allen of the *Vancouver Province*, who had formerly criticized the troupe for their lack of distinctiveness, wrote:

> I'm pleased to report that the company is well on its way to good from indifferent . . . watch out for future Canadian Theatre of the Deaf performances. You won't be attending in order to be nice to 'cripples'. You'll simply be attending to enjoy some good mime (qtd in *CTD Newsletter*. April 1978).

However, he still notes that while the company is improving, it is not in a new style, but only in the style which he saw before: mime.

The company's program had changed slightly, with the first part of the performance dedicated to vignettes of classical mime, and the second part containing some surreal pieces. The final part was improvisation. Their new show was called "Moments Unmasked," and was comprised of:

> several pieces exploring a variety of ideas: communication, attitudes towards work, reaction in the face of death, games that mankind plays, etc. The show is unique in that it employs the fully silent communication skills that deaf culture has evolved. Corporeal mime, pure movement pantomime and character work using mask and minimal props and costuming, feed and intensify each other to give expression to the total range of human emotion ("Moments Unmasked").

There is still little evidence that the direction in which the company was headed had to do with any exploration of language. Larry Scanlan of the *Nelson Daily News* wrote, "In sum, the Canadian Theatre of the Deaf showed awesome talent and a willingness to enter thresholds mimists don't usually enter. In part two of their performance the white paint came off and the troupe took off in a new direction." Scanlan praised the troupe for "old mime routines given new life", and for their mime, which was "sophisticated and rich -- as rich a mime as I have ever seen" (qtd. in *CTD Newsletter*. May 1978). However, this still does not confirm that the direction was heading closer to that of the NTD, but rather was continuing to look for new ways to present mime. Although it can be said that the performance style of the CTD did evolve over the years of its existence, it must be pointed out that it never forged new ground in terms of the use of American Sign Language. The CTD did, however, engage in segments which confronted issues regarding deaf culture and problems with

communication, but there was nothing distinctive that set the company apart from other mime companies. Ultimately, this led to its demise.

Whose Theatre is it Anyway?

The question of "whose theatre is it anyway" can be asked in relation to the relationship between the CCSD and the CTD. Ultimately, the theatre belonged to the CCSD, but remained the BC Deaf Mime Troupe. It certainly did not belong to the deaf community, for they had had no input into its development. In addition, the relationship between the CCSD and the CTD was never firmly established. It was understood that the CCSD was the parent organization, but beyond that, there were no guidelines set up regarding distribution of work. At the time the new CTD was established, the BC Deaf Mime Troupe had been looking for financial support, and for them, a change of name did not seem to mean anything more than that. After their first tour, the CTD began to slowly make its move away from total dependence on the CCSD. As an affiliate of the society, the CTD was tied to its cultural and societal beliefs. They were responsible to, and dependent upon, the CCSD for funding and support. When the CTD was having financial difficulties, it was the CCSD who solicited funds for them. However, when the CTD received their Canada Works Grant, there was no longer a need for financial support from the CCSD, so they began to centralize their operations in Vancouver. Nickerson stressed that the CCSD wanted to maintain the relationship between the two organizations:

> . . . we feel that there has been a lack of communication between the CTD and the CCSD. . . this is what has displeased the Executive

> Board of the CCSD and the Provincial Directors across Canada. Please remember that the CTD is an affiliate with the CCSD (Nickerson, 17 Dec. 1977).

Sporadic letters between the two organizations relayed basic operational information, but no in-depth reports were made to the CCSD until January 1978. Once the CTD got going in Vancouver, there was nothing in place to determine who took on what role and to what extent. The CTD wanted to have total independence from the CCSD, and the CCSD wanted to maintain control. At this time, the CCSD felt that for their own security and the security of the CTD, they needed to be apprised of the CTD's activity in B.C. While the monthly reports kept the CCSD up to date on the progress of the CTD, there was no other direct communication between the two organizations.

As a final move away from the CCSD, the CTD decided to pursue its own incorporation, and it seemed that the CCSD was willing to cooperate. In a letter to his lawyer on June 24, 1978, Forrest Nickerson wrote, "At our recent meeting of the CCSD, we have decided to bring this whole matter up to a general meeting at the Fourth National Cultural Convention and Tournament of the CCSD in Montreal during the week of July 19-23, 1978. It is very likely that we will let the CTD become incorporated" (Nickerson, 24 June 1978). However, shortly after this letter, the CCSD changed its mind, because questions regarding Hanrahan's credibility continued to plague both the CTD and the CCSD. The CCSD was so far removed from the CTD that they were uncertain whether or not to let the CTD incorporate.

In fact, the CCSD was so far removed that when the CTD ceased operations in 1979, it came as a surprise to the CCSD. The CCSD had no financial records of the company, and it was unaware of the specifics of the

Canada Works Grant. The CCSD wrote to Hanrahan, prodding him with questions: "How much and when did the CTD get a grant from Canada Works? What was the purpose of this grant? How was it spent? Why was the CTD disbanded so suddenly while there was a grant available long enough to keep the CTD going?" (Petrone Stratiy, 4 May 1981). This letter was not written until four years after the CTD had received the Canada Works Grant. This is an important point, as the company had already been disbanded for two years by the time these questions were asked. The lack of communication between the two organizations not only was detrimental to the success of the CTD as a company, but also to the CCSD itself, as they had to deal with all of the aftermath, involving the charges of misused funds. The CCSD opened investigations into the financial reports of the CTD to find out what had happened. Hanrahan's reply to the CCSD outlined some of the reasons for the dissolution of the troupe:

> . . .the group was disbanded for various reasons which I am not legally at liberty to discuss. I will say, however, that there were personal factors involved, and there were personality conflicts within the group. Also, there was no certainty of future bookings for the group, and, as you know, this is the lifeblood of any theatre group (Hanrahan, 2 July 1981).

Conclusions

The Canadian Theatre of the Deaf faced many obstacles in their short history. A struggling theatre company is nothing unique, in Canada or in the United States. The important thing to note when exploring deaf theatre in Canada as a whole is that the CTD is not an isolated example. Twenty-two years have passed since the establishment of the CTD, and there have

been at least five other theatre companies established which claim to be "deaf theatres". Each of these attempts has also failed. While advances have been made in deaf cultural awareness in both the United States and Canada, Canada still lags behind in the area of the arts. Some of the obstacles that the CTD faced have now been overcome due to technology. E-mail and TTY machines would now take care of many of the communication problems faced by the CTD. As well, there have been a number of films which have deaf characters in major roles, deaf schools are trying to expand their drama programs, and more deaf artists are crossing over into mainstream theatre through projects such as the Non-Traditional Casting Project. Despite these advances, deaf theatre still does not occupy a strong presence on the Canadian cultural landscape. The reasons for this can be found in part in the experience of the Canadian Theatre of the Deaf, for although it was established over twenty years ago, deaf theatre companies that have been established in Canada since that time still struggle with some of the same issues.

The Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf continued to be consistently involved in trying to set up a theatre company which would represent deaf Canadians. In the 1980s, the CCSD and Lewis Hartland, a deaf man who was involved in the first CTD, established the Canadian Deaf Theatre. This theatre, too, was based on mime. It seems that much of the problem facing the CCSD is distinguishing between the style of deaf theatre, and the style of mime. Clear objectives need to be put in place in order for a national Deaf theatre company to emerge. Specific problems of the CTD were lack of appropriate leadership, faults in its founding, lack of resources, and lack of training.

To say that the Canadian Theatre of the Deaf was the right idea at the wrong time, or the wrong idea at the right time, would be an understatement. Ultimately, the main reason that the company failed in its stated objectives was that the original vision for a national deaf theatre in Canada was ignored in favour of a quick transfer in name between companies. This is not to say that the BC Deaf Mime Troupe did not have any potential to become a troupe with a distinct performance style which reflected the language and culture of the deaf, but it was first and foremost a mime troupe. The CTD was just the first of many attempts at deaf theatre in Canada. It is significant because it was the first, and also because its experience illuminates some of the general problems facing those wanting to set up a deaf theatre in Canada.

Before the CCSD even approached Mike Hanrahan with the idea of changing the BC Deaf Mime Troupe over into the CTD, there were elements already in place which may have determined the eventual failure of the company. In comparison with the cultural climate in the United States at the time that the NTD was formed, Canada was lacking in deaf cultural awareness. The only deaf theatre that came to Canada was touring performances by the NTD. There was no central cultural force in Canada such as Gallaudet which graduated talented deaf actors, or consistently put on deaf theatre plays. The lack, not only of deaf theatre in Canada, but also adequate training, played a significant role in the outcome of attempts at deaf theatre. This was telling in the troupes that were set up in the past. Most were set up for educational purposes, playing to schools and community events to make children aware of deafness through workshops after performances. Theatres set up specifically for educational purposes seem to be more successful than the strictly mime-based approach of

theatres like the CTD. These companies, which relied on project-to-project funding, were unsuccessful in securing a commercially and critically successful theatre performance. If there was a training ground as rich as that provided by the school at the NTD, there would be a larger resource of talented artists interested in pursuing deaf theatre.

Not only is there no specific training ground in Canada for deaf theatre, but drama has not been a major part of the curriculum in deaf schools. At least, if there was interest through deaf schools, other than just for fundraising purposes, the interest in drama may have had more of a chance to reach beyond high school. Angela Petrone Stratiy stresses the need for drama in education:

> All of the high schools have visual arts and art and theatre. The deaf school doesn't have that. So it has got to start in school where the appreciation of arts comes into play. Then that will build it to become a stronger piece of their lives. For me, I never had the training, it was just a thing I really enjoyed and I didn't start training until I went to Gallaudet and I minored in Drama. So if I had started back in school when I was younger, it would have been much different (Petrone Stratiy).

The objective of the CCSD was to provide an organization that would allow art to become a daily part of deaf people's lives. In order to achieve that objective, exposure to the arts needs to start early and continue throughout high school and college. However, in order for Canadians to participate in a training program for deaf theatre, they need to attend either Gallaudet or the National Theatre of the Deaf in Connecticut. To begin to educate people about the value of culture and the power of theatre is to undertake the exploration of a medium which combines both. Deaf theatre in schools would provide an important means for analyzing deaf culture, and for building an appreciation of theatre.

The Canadian Theatre of the Deaf also suffered from inconsistency in touring. The National Theatre of the Deaf toured extensively in its early years, and because of that, gained the exposure they needed to bring an audience into a mainstage show. The CTD only toured sporadically, and when they did tour, there was barely enough time to advertise the event, so their exposure was limited. Touring is especially important in Canada, where the deaf population is spread across such a large area. If the theatre is committed to playing to the deaf community, it is necessary to go to them, because the deaf community in one area is not large enough to support a theatre. The NTD has overcome a similar difficulty by making their performances accessible to the larger audience of hearing theatre patrons.

Even if educational programs were put in place, and a training school were to be established, there would have to be people with vision willing to see through the development of a deaf theatre. Although Mike Hanrahan had vision for a theatre, it was not the vision of the national deaf community in Canada. It would also take a person with administrative skill and experience in deaf theatre. A group of people brought together with these qualities, and the willingness and opportunity to spend the time on adequate publicity and advertising, could be the beginning of something in Canada that would rival the NTD in the United States. According to Gordon Hoeppner, "they need deaf leaders. There is no network of communication. There is a deaf community, of course, but there just doesn't seem to be an attachment with the deaf community and the theatre community" (Hoeppner).

What is it about the deaf community in Canada that is different from the deaf community in the United States? According to Petrone Stratiy,

> [the] NTD is very fortunate. They have the right people, they know where to get their donations from, there are a lot of hearing people that they have networks and contacts with. But here I think the deaf community should do that and unfortunately, they don't have the networking. . . to work together.

Hoeppner expands Petrone Stratiy's explanation further to include the fact that Americans

> . . . have a natural attitude toward the deaf. Of course, there is a larger number of deaf artists with those interests. In Canada, there doesn't seem to be a lot of encouragement or there hasn't been in the past. The NTD itself, for example, is very recognized internationally (Hoeppner).

A company needs to be started which captures the imagination of the deaf community and is aware of their needs. Does the deaf community want a theatre to which they can relate and enjoy within their own community? Or do they want a theatre that may prove difficult for them to understand, but which provides a platform for awareness of the deaf community to hearing patrons, thus expanding the audience and the potential sources of funding? Whatever the objective of the company, there need to be personnel who are skilled and experienced with deaf theatre in order to get things going, and keep them going.

These factors which contribute to the establishment of a deaf theatre are all interdependent. Without education, there will be no interest; without training, there will be no deaf artists and leaders to start up a company; without vision, there will be no one to see the future for deaf theatre; without practical administrators, there will be nothing holding a company together, and no one to fundraise; and without money, the company will not be able to survive. In Canada, the deaf community is spread over such a large area and the traditions of drama in education and

post-secondary drama training are not offered to the deaf. If some of these factors were to be employed by visionaries such as Gordon Hoeppner, who is committed to the future of deaf theatre in Canada - "we will work on it. I see a future for it. I'm certainly going to keep striving for it" - then perhaps deaf theatre will be able to move out of the land of obscurity into another land to reap a rich harvest.

Appendix: Other Deaf Theatre Activity in Canada

The Canadian Theatre of the Deaf was not the only deaf theatre in Canada during the 1970s, and it certainly was not the last. Deaf theatre companies are still emerging in Canada, trying to establish themselves as vital participants in Canadian theatre. Unfortunately, for the most part, these attempts have failed. It is useful to document some of the other deaf theatres that have contributed to the history of deaf theatre in Canada as well as to note what kinds of things have to happen in the future in order to secure a place for deaf theatre in Canada.

Theatre Visuel des Sourds (TVS)

Le Theatre Visuel des Sourds (TVS) was established in 1968. This company was founded by three deaf men: Serge Briere, Jean Goulet, and Andre Maltais. This group participated in the first Biennial cultural competition to include French Canada. They were well received, and won all of the awards for performance. The focus of TVS was mainly mime, and in 1976, Serge Briere left the company to study with the Canadian Theatre of the Deaf. When the CTD folded, he returned to Quebec and joined with Jacques Hamon, Jean Goulet and Gerard Courchesne to form another group named Le Theatre des Sourds de Montreal(TVSM). TVS was still in Quebec, and members of that troupe would often work with TVSM, a situation that eventually led to a merger of the two troupes in 1984. Unlike the CTD, TVS was incorporated in 1988 and sought funding from the federal government to participate in school projects. They received this funding, and following their incorporation, renamed themselves Theatre Visuel des Sourds de Quebec. The theatre still exists,

with a new member named Johanne Boulanger as Vice President. She and Briere participate in productions as well as teach Langue des Signes Quebecoise (LSQ), which is the French-Canadian sign language. They both taught a ten-week mime workshop for children, which took place at the Roland Major Centre in Montreal. The company "performs an average of four plays per year for children and adults and the troupe is considered avant-garde in their performance techniques" (Carbin 344). TVS is one of the longest-running theatres of deaf performers in Canada. Their focus, however, is on mime, and not deaf theatre.

A Show of Hands

Soon after the Canadian Theatre of the Deaf folded in 1981, the CCSD received a letter about a new deaf theatre production being planned in the Toronto area. In a letter to Angela Petrone Stratiy of the CCSD, Michele Pinet, a hearing woman, related that she had been awarded a government grant to do "research on theatre for deaf/hearing audiences" (Pinet, 6 Feb. 1981). Along with Jim McDermott, a deaf man, she was developing a touring show comprised of deaf and hearing actors to be called 'The Greatest Little Sign Show on Earth'. The company was to be called A Show of Hands. The format of the show was designed to be:

> . . . a signed production created especially for the deaf community but could be enjoyed by the hearing community as well. It would explore many of the happy/sad experiences of being deaf expressed in short scenes, songs, poems, mime and dance. It would follow a revue format involving material researched from within the community through workshops, interviews, group discussions and social gatherings. (Pinet, 6 Feb. 1981).

The goals for this theatre were the same as those of the CTD and the TVS in building awareness, encouraging deaf involvement in the arts, and

providing training (Pinet, 6 Feb. 1981). In 1984, A Show of Hands became a registered company, and in 1984 and 1985, they did seven workshops for the deaf community which were sponsored by Theatre Ontario. In 1986, they continued to do workshops. Their performances consisted of full-length plays as well as short original scenes (*A Show of Hands*).

In 1987, the CÇSD approached A Show of Hands, and proposed a merger between the Canadian Theatre of the Deaf and Pinet's company. At the time of this proposal, A Show of Hands was under the sponsorship of Theatre Ontario and could not change their sponsorship. They not only toured their show but were also involved in providing sign-language-interpreted performances for shows such as *CATS* at the Elgin Theatre in Ontario on Sept. 21, 1985 (*A Show of Hands*). Other original works performed by A Show of Hands included 'If only you weren't so wishy washy Charlie Brown!' , 'The Shooting of Dan McGrew', and 'Commedia'. A Show of Hands was created as a specific project and has grown to incorporate other shows in its repetoire. This company works on project-to-project funding, and is focussed on education and awareness.

The Canadian Deaf Theatre (CDT)

In 1989, the CCSD found a deaf man willing to be a part of reactivating the defunct Canadian Theatre of the Deaf. Lewis Hartland, along with his wife Connie, founded the newly named Canadian Deaf Theatre (CDT) in Cranbrook, British Columbia. Hartland had trained at the Canadian Mime Theatre School in 1977:

> He was one of the founding members of the Canadian Theatre of the Deaf and performed with that company in 1976 and 1977. . . . In

> 1988 and 1989, he toured in the United States with the National Theatre of the Deaf. In the summer of 1989, he was one of the invited performers at The Deaf Way Conference and Festival in Washington, D.C. While there, he was approached by a representative of the Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf, who encouraged him to form what became the CDT. First sponsored by the CCSD as an affiliate organization, CDT later received provincial and federal grants as well as private donations (Carbin 246).

This company was primarily mime-based, much like the original Canadian Theatre of the Deaf. Its first show, 'Varieties', premiered January 10, 1990 and starred Lewis Hartland and Toni Miller, who is a hearing actress. The purpose of the company was similar to the original CTD:

> . . .'a belief in the interest and inherent natural ability of deaf people to act and entertain on a serious professional level and to offer something different from that of the hearing/speaking theatrical medium' (Carbin 346).

In 1992, Hartland and his wife moved to the Yukon, "where they own and operate a store called Last Frontier Sports Card and Comics. Hartland hopes to move the CDT from Cranbrook, British Columbia to Whitehorse and establish it in the Yukon with a new board of directors" (Carbin 347). The CDT is currently inactive because there was no one available to take it over after the Hartlands left for the Yukon.

Earlier in his career, Hartland tried to start up two other deaf theatre companies in Toronto, The Deaf Mime Company of Toronto (1977) and the Ontario Theatre of the Deaf (1982). There is not much information available on the operations of either of these companies. It is known, however, that neither company had much success, and both were disbanded shortly after they were established (Carbin 347).

Fingers Happy Productions

Gordon Hoeppner and his wife Carol are currently involved in a theatre group called Fingers Happy Productions. Hoeppner formed the company in 1993, and "to date, it is the only professional theatre company in Canada to have a presentation to increase deaf awareness using drama in education for public school tours and libraries" (*Fingers Happy Productions*). During 1994-1996, the company presented both adapted and original works which they toured in south-central Ontario. This company also provides workshops on ASL's handshapes and acting classes.

Gordon Hoeppner was stage manager for the Canadian Theatre of the Deaf in 1975. He toured with the company for one year, after which he left to try other things. He studied acting at the Carousel Theatre School in Vancouver in 1984 and received a Canada Council Grant to study with the NTD in 1986. Hoeppner trained at the NTD and has toured with the Fairmont Theatre for the Deaf in Cleveland, Ohio, as a performer. He was involved in touring with A Show of Hands in 1986, after which he co-produced a production of *The Elephant Man* at Equity Showcase Theatre. He also performed in the production as Dr. Troves. The production involved "mirror narration", for which a hearing Dr. Troves and a deaf Dr. Troves spoke and signed together.

Hoeppner took Fingers Happy Productions to Vancouver for the Fall of 1997. The productions are focused on education and awareness. The company performs mostly in schools with their repertoire of five plays: 'Found. . . In the Wardrobe Trunk,' 'Dancing Sign Travelers of Bremen Town,' 'ASL's Tales in Christmas Story,' 'Fairy Tales Come Alive with ASL,' and 'Fairies in Deaf's Tales'. (*Fingers Happy Productions*). The

goal of Fingers Happy Productions is "education through drama. . . the new projects are for children and they will be an education, not necessarily teaching signs but deaf culture, either for the deaf or for hearing and deaf both" (Hoeppner). This company, like A Show of Hands, exists mainly to educate children about deafness and ASL. They also exist from grant to grant, and are dependent on workshops for much of their revenue.

Other Troupes

Other amateur troupes have been formed, such as The Deaf-Gypsy Mime Company. This company was founded in 1976 by Robert Ziegler as an educational endeavor to teach mime to nine students from St. Andrew's Public School in Halifax, N.S., and was made possible by a one-year Canada Council Grant. Luke Lukaszek, Sherry Hunter and Patricia Hildebrand were also members of the troupe which toured schools and community centers. (Doull 22-23). School groups have often been formed to put on plays for fund-raising activities. The Alberta School for the Deaf presented *Laurent Clerc: A Profile* by Gilbert Eastman on March 20-21, 1997, in order to raise funds for students to go to Paris and England. Individual performers such as Angela Petrone Stratiy perform at festivals and conferences. Stratiy performs a "one-woman special ASL performance featuring humorous perspectives on hearing people based on her 'research', songs with drum, famous skit as the Bride's Mother and more" (*Canadian Deaf Festival*).

All of these companies have as their objectives to use deaf actors and to bring awareness to the deaf community. Only the Theatre Visuel des Sourds has had long-term success. The troupes mentioned above, along

with the Canadian Theatre of the Deaf, provide signposts for what deaf theatre could become if given vision and funding.

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The title of my thesis was inspired by Percy's title. I have changed the wording to signify the various deaf theatres attempted in Canada as "signposts" of what has happened in the past, so that lessons might be learned for the future. The "other" signifies the deaf community; hence, "an other land." These signposts should lead to a theatre which would truly represent the deaf community.

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